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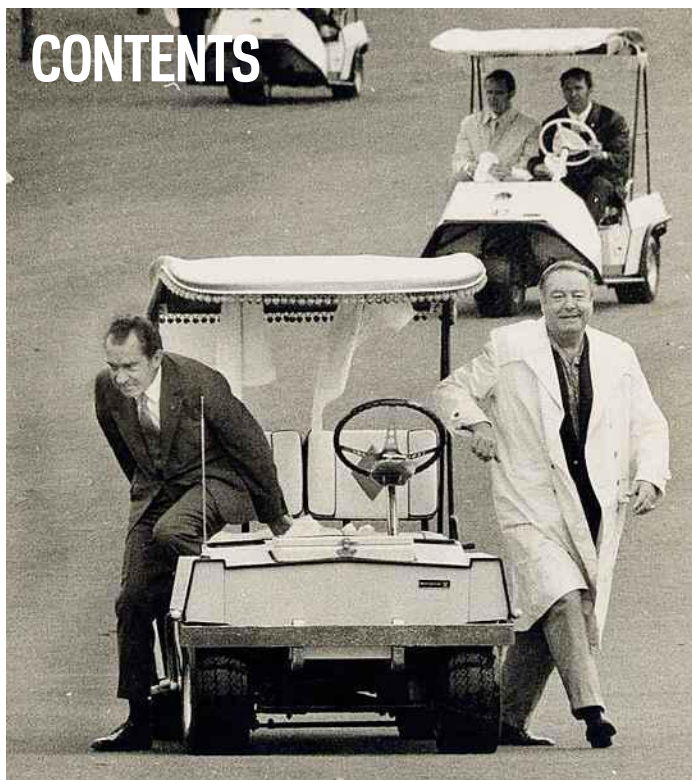
**FEATHERS, FIRE  
AND BRIMSTONE**

THE MANY FACES OF  
MEPHISTOPHELES





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# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

## SAD SYNCHRONICITIES

### RIP GUY LYON PLAYFAIR

As we were readying this issue to go to press, we received sad news of the passing of Guy Lyon Playfair, just a few days after his 83rd birthday. Guy will be well known to readers of *FT* over the years – as a contributor to the magazine, for his decades of work with the Society for Psychical Research and as the author of books such as *This House is Haunted* and *If*

*This Be Magic*. For many people, he will perhaps be best remembered for his investigation, with Maurice Grosse, into the celebrated Enfield Poltergeist case of the late 1970s. A couple of years ago, this was the subject of a well-received television drama, about which Guy had this to say to *FT* at the time:

“It was quite an honour to be portrayed by award-winning Matthew Macfadyen, whom I envy for his ability to seduce Keira Knightley twice – in *Pride and Prejudice* and again in *Anna Karenina*. How true to life he was as me is not for me to say. I suspect not very, but most of *The Enfield Haunting* didn't have much to do with reality as I recall it either, except the red E-type Jaguar which was absolutely authentic.”

Guy died in his sleep in hospital on Sunday, 8 April; coincidentally, this was just a few hours before Radio 4 broadcast an episode of *The Reunion* dedicated to the Enfield case, bringing together some of the original witnesses and reporters of the phenomenon – a coincidence that would have appealed to Guy as a collector of synchronicities. As Alan Murdie pointed out to us in an email, this was also the Sunday when the Church commemorates the risen Jesus's appearance to the Apostle Thomas (he of doubting fame); Thomas was also called Thomas Didymus, which means ‘the twin’. Twins, and the unusual abilities attributed to them, were another of Guy's abiding interests. In 2002, he published a book-length study of the phenomenon of Twin Telepathy, and the following year wrote a major article on the subject for *FT* (“The Twin Thing”, *FT*171:34-40). We will publish a full obituary for Guy in our next issue.

### MR FORT GOES TO BLOOMSBURY

On a more cheerful note, residents of London's Bloomsbury will be seeing Charles Fort (beautifully illustrated by Ross Becker, below) on the cover of the Spring edition of their neighbourhood's *Journal*. It's a publication that usually focuses on the area's fashionable restaurants and watering holes, expensive clothes emporia and notable (living) locals; and while

Bloomsbury's literary heritage inevitably gets a look-in in the form of Virginia Woolf and her set, we hope that *Journal* readers are intrigued to discover that, between 1920 and 1928, the forefather of this very magazine once walked Bloomsbury's streets and squares and conducted years of research in the Reading Room of the British Museum. If you should find yourself in this part of London, you can pick up a free copy from many of the shops and cafés in the area.

And while you're there, do go and admire the plaque at 39 Marchmont Street that commemorates Fort's years at the address (see *FT*327:2 for the story behind it). For our readers who can't make it to Bloomsbury, you can find the feature online at <http://bloomsbury.journal-ldn.com>.



### ERRATA

**FT365:9:** James Wright pointed out a particularly wince-inducing typo in the Sideline ‘SWAN ATROCITY’: “signets” should of course have been “cygnets”.

**FT364:60:** Eric Hoffman noted an error in the review of *UFO Contact at Pascagoula*; the original, privately printed edition was published in 1983, not 1973, as claimed in the review. “As the incident occurred in October of 1973, that would have to be one rushed-to-press volume!”

**FT365:67:** Tom Ruffles spotted a mistake in this issue's “Building a Fortean Library” entry: Kulagina's first name is given as Nelil, whereas it should be Ninel (Lenin backwards), or Нине́ль in the original.

*David R. Sutton*  
DAVID R. SUTTON

*Bob Rickard*  
BOB RICKARD

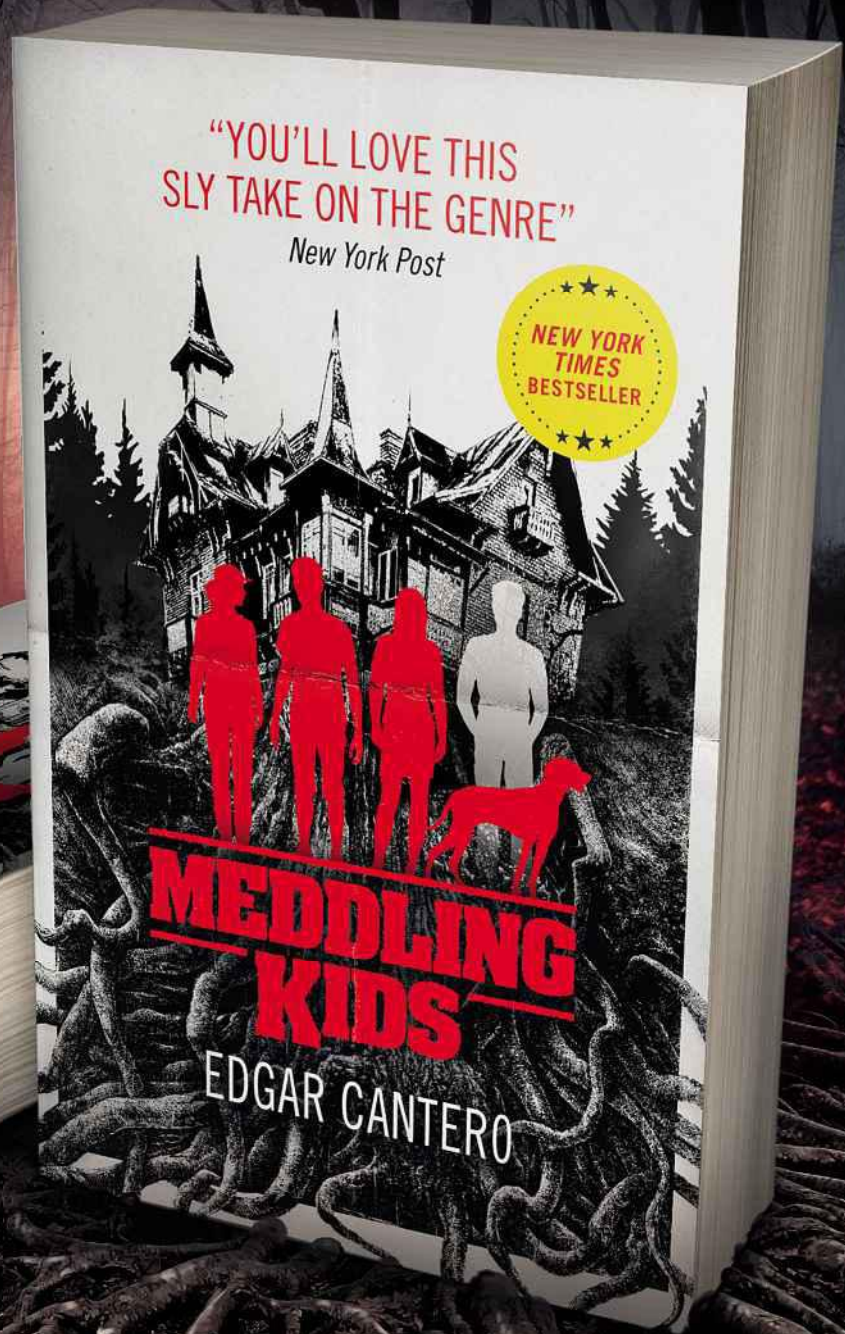
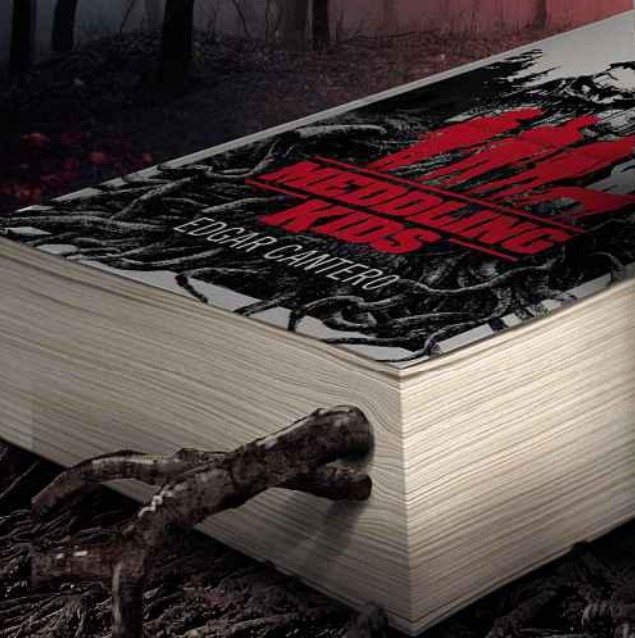
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## THE ATACAMA 'HUMANOID'

Ata is human, not alien, and her mutations could help medical science

On 19 October 2003, Oscar Muñoz came upon the skeletal remains of a tiny creature in a pouch near an abandoned church in La Noria, a nitrate-mining ghost town in Chile's Atacama Desert. The 6in (15cm)-long "Atacama Humanoid" – nicknamed Ata – was acquired by Ramón Navia-Osorio, a collector in Spain. It has a long, cone-shaped skull, large eye sockets, scaly skin, and 10 pairs of ribs instead of the standard 12. A documentary called *Sirius* asserted it was extraterrestrial. Others suggested it was a non-human primate. Scientists studied DNA from bone marrow in one of the ribs, and in 2013 concluded that Ata was a mutated human [FT302:5].

After further analysis – including X-rays, CT scans and DNA sequencing, reported in the journal *Genome Research* – scientists at Stanford and the University of California, San Francisco, found that Ata was a human female, closely related to the local population. Reconstructing her genome, they found that she lived less than 500 years ago and shared some European ancestry, meaning she was born after South America was colonised. The BBC report states: "The skeleton's intact condition suggests it may be no more than 40 years old". Ata's bones were as developed as those of a six-year-old – the sutures of her skull, for instance, were already fused – even though she was about the same size as a 22-week-old fetus. She suffered from a litany of genetic mutations, some completely unknown – but no specific disorder could be identified. The scientists identified 54 mutations



ABOVE: The tiny skeleton found in a Chilean ghost town in October 2003.

### A cone-shaped skull, large eye sockets and 10 pairs of ribs

that could have affected skeletal structure. These have been linked to bone disorders like skeletal dysplasia, rib anomalies, and dwarfism.

"What was striking and caused us to speculate early on that there was something strange about the bones was their apparent maturity (density and shape)," said Garry Nolan, a professor of microbiology and immunology at Stanford. "There was proportionate maturation of the bones, making the body look more mature despite the fact that the specimen was itself small. This discrepancy drove much of the research. So, we believe that one or more of the mutated genes was responsible for this." Prof Nolan said further

research into Ata's precocious bone aging could one day benefit patients. "Maybe there's a way to accelerate bone growth in people who need it, people who have bad breaks," he said. "Nothing like this had been seen before. Certainly, nobody had looked into the genetics of it... The era of single gene/single disease is just about over – it's now time to look at the more subtle effects when genes interact. In isolation, a gene might have no effect... but combined with other genes, the outcomes can be dramatic."

Curiously, another tiny 'humanoid' had allegedly been found in Chile a year earlier, in October 2002, by a small boy called Julio Carreño. It was discovered under some bushes in the southern town of Concepcion. It opened its eyes and drank water, but died after a few days [FT166:7].

As bizarre as Ata's skeleton may appear, it isn't the first example of remains that look mostly human but nevertheless invite comparisons to popular

images of creatures from science fiction. In 1999, excavations in a 1,000-year-old cemetery in Mexico yielded 13 human skeletons – many of them children – with skulls that were stretched and pointed in the back, bearing a distinctly alien appearance; but the skulls' unusual shapes stemmed from cultural practices that deliberately deformed the bone, similar to those seen in pre-Hispanic cultures in Central America. And 14 elongated, alien-like skulls in Bavarian graves dating to 1,500 years ago also were traced to cultural practices of cranial shaping, this time in tribes from southeastern Europe.

However, five so-called "alien mummies" from Peru – mummified humanoids with three-fingered hands – have been widely denounced as fabrications, probably cobbled together from looted body parts belonging to real human remains. The mummies, covered with white powder, were supposedly discovered in 2015 by tomb robbers working in the Nazca region. Jamie Maussan, a former investigative journalist infamous for his involvement in several high-profile UFO hoaxes, was part of the Peruvian mummy team. FT correspondent Nigel Watson, author of the *UFO Investigations Manual*, was quoted by the *Daily Mail* as saying: "He has cried wolf too often to be ever taken seriously by anyone with at least one functioning brain cell."

A faux-academic Russian named Konstantin Korotkov announced he had done DNA tests on the mummies and said they "could be extraterrestrials or bio robots." Korotkov sells a product called Bio-Well that he claims can detect "human light". He was widely criticised in 2008 when he claimed to have created a camera that could photograph the human soul. *dailymail.co.uk*, 12 Mar; *livescience.com*, 16 Mar; *Genome Research*, *livescience.com*, *BBC News*, 22 Mar; *businessinsider.com*, *D. Telegraph*, 23 Mar 2018.





## BENTHAM IN AMERICA

The preserved philosopher takes a US trip

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## LOG NESS MONSTER

The Dresden sea serpent and other Euro-news

PAGE 18



## HERE COME THE ALIENS

How Kim Wilde was inspired by a UFO sighting

PAGE 29

# THE CONSPIRASPHERE

With the surprising recovery of the victims and new questions about the nerve agent used on them, the Skripal affair grows curiouser and curiouser, says **NOEL ROONEY**...

## SKRIPAL 2.0

My last article on the Skripal affair really didn't do justice to the growing complexities of the incident. The story appeared relatively straightforward, in some respects, at the time; and the responses of the mainstream (the Russians did it!) and the Conspirasphere (oh no they didn't!) looked for all the world like familiar reactions to a done deal. Not so, it now appears.

The first, and most surprising, development concerns the health of the victims. Yulia Skripal has now been discharged from hospital, and her father, while recovering more slowly, is expected to follow at some point. This is pretty unusual given the alleged nature of the assassination weapon; nerve agents are generally deadly, and where they aren't, the effects are disabling, usually for life. The police officer who was affected is also recovering. The only fatalities seem to be the family pets, and some reports suggest they actually died from starvation.

The nature, provenance, and very existence, of the nerve agent in question (see p14) have come under scrutiny from other quarters. Scientists at Porton Down and various international bodies have expressed doubt as to whether Russia ever actually developed the Novichok class of nerve agents; other commentators have pointed out that, for Porton Down, or any other body, to identify the substance, they would need previous access to an independent sample of it. In either case, the certainty that pervaded the mainstream media in the immediate aftermath of the incident is now giving way to a growing sense of, at best, puzzlement, and at worst, outright suspicion of the official account.

Novichok was supposedly applied to the front door of the Skripal residence in Salisbury. But then how did Sergei Skripal and his daughter manage to go for a walk in town, have a drink at a riverside pub and a meal at a restaurant in the hours

afterwards? Nerve agents are very fast-acting; the Skripals should have been disabled more or less immediately. And some experts have suggested that, if the agent were applied as reported, large numbers of people in the immediate area should also have been affected. Yet, and despite reports at the time, only three people were harmed. The area should still be contaminated; yet it has not been evacuated or cordoned off. None of this makes any sense, and the Conspirasphere knows it; responses are plentiful, and have a gleeful 'I told you so' ring to them.

Novichok is in danger of promotion to the 'magic bullet' class of weaponry usually reserved for the elite end of the conspiracy market. If it exists. Russia is asking for a joint investigation, and no one wants to play; meanwhile, other members of the Skripal family have been refused entry to the UK, on dubious grounds (do the UK authorities really believe the Russians could have hired or forced family members to finish the job for them?). The principal victims will now, it appears, be spirited away to start new lives, possibly in the USA, under new identities; while the rationale given is to protect them from further attacks, this part of the story sounds more like the treatment reserved for 'supergrass' witnesses or spies. Some have suggested this is designed to keep the Skripals out of the public eye (and possibly the news loop) and there are dark mutterings about The Powers That Be wanting to silence them permanently (which is where we came in, but the pantomime villain has changed costume).

The doubts expressed by some in the Conspirasphere (which I wrongly dismissed as knee-jerk reaction) have leaked into the mainstream with a vengeance (and with somewhat more efficacy than Novichok, it appears). This is very different from the mainstream's use of conspiracy stories for comic distraction. The rabbit hole has edged a little closer.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

## MAN JAILED FOR THREATENING LAMPPOSTS WITH KNIFE

Bristol Post, 2 Oct 2017.

## Long wait for answers after death

Richmond & Twickenham Times, 17 Feb 2017.

## JESUS FIT AGAIN AND READY FOR CITY RETURN

D.Telegraph, 22 April 2017.

## Dublin zoo invaded by dinosaurs

Irish Daily Mail, 7 July 2017.

## POLICE COMPUTERS DOWN AFTER OWL INCIDENT

Bristol Post, 29 Aug 2017.

## Dogs that did not bark 'due to lack of money'

Irish Times, 12 Oct 2017.





## WHALE I NEVER

PAUL SIEVEKING talks to the animals – in this case, a 14-year-old captive orca that has reportedly learned to mimic human speech

• An orca (killer whale) that can mimic words has been announced as the first of its kind to copy human speech. The 14-year-old female named Wikie, at Marineland Aquarium in Antibes, France, was trained to understand a 'copy' signal and then invited to repeat 11 new sounds, rewarded with a fish or an affectionate pat. She 'speaks' words through her blowhole and can be heard in recordings mimicking words such as "Hello", "Bye-bye" and "Amy" (her trainer's name), and counting "One, two, three" using squawks and shrill whistles and raspberries. She has also been trained to mimic noises such as a creaking door, an elephant call and a wolf howl. Six adjudicators were then asked to rate whether the vocalisation matched the original word or noise.

Whales and dolphins are among the few animals other than humans that can learn to produce a novel sound just by hearing it. "In mammals it is very rare," said Dr Josep Call of the University of St Andrews, a co-researcher on the study. "Humans obviously are good at it... Interestingly, the mammals that can do best are marine mammals." Killer whales are known to live in groups with unique vocal 'dialects' – learned sounds used for communication that are kept within a particular population and passed to future generations. Pods 'talk' to each other using complex clicks and singing, even when they are 100 miles apart. Killer whales both in the wild and in captivity have also been observed copying dolphin calls and the barks of sea lions. Vocal imitation is a hallmark of human spoken language, yet in other animals it is strikingly rare. Dolphins and beluga whales are among the few mammals that can copy sounds from other species or each other. Some birds can mimic human speech, notably parrots, but also some members of the



LEFT: Communicating with orcas at the Marineland Aquarium in Antibes, France.

As I suggested in 2012: "Perhaps cats all over the world are talking Turkish, and we just don't notice" [FT3:3, 296:10]. The Gang of Fort fondly recalls the talking tortoise of Uganda in 1978 [FT27:39], and the talking carp in a New York fish market in 2003 [FT171:9].

• A study made between 2010 and 2014 discovered that a 200-strong bowhead whale colony off Spitsbergen, Norway, has a repertoire of 184 songs. They sing in a freeform

crow family.

Dr Jose Abramson, from Complutense University of Madrid, a co-researcher on the study, said basic 'conversations' with Wikie might one day be possible. "Yes, it's conceivable... if you have labels, descriptions of what things are," he said. "It has been done before with a famous grey parrot [Alex, FT56:9, 230:28] and dolphins using American sign language; sentences like 'bring me this object' or 'put this object above or below the other'." However, he said we have to be careful about imposing human concepts on animals, as there is more to gain by trying to understand the natural way each species communicates in its own environment. The experiments are reported in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B*. *BBC News*, *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, *Metro*, 31 Jan 2018.

• Curiously, few of the recent press reports mention Noc, a beluga whale in captivity in San Diego, California, whose unusual vocalisations were first noted in 1984. According to a 2012 study in *Current Biology*, Noc (who died in 2007) was trying to "reach out" to his human captors. And back in 1981, a seal in a Boston aquarium called Hoover could say "Hello there", "How are ya?", "Come over here", "Get outta here", "get down" and "Hoover" – all with a

distinct Boston accent. Whether Hoover understood what he said was of course unknowable [FT296:10-11].

• The fact that it was thought necessary to consult six judges to assess whether Wikie's vocalisations matched words reminds us of the pitfalls of pareidolia, the human tendency to perceive order in random data: the Blessed Virgin Mary appears in damp stains and the dead seem to speak though a fog of recorded white noise. Sceptics suggest pareidolia probably accounts for some tales of talking animals. Batyr, the talking elephant of Kazakhstan, in 1977 was heard to say (in Russian) such things as "Batyr good boy. Go away". In 2012 came news of Koshik, an elephant in South Korea that had learnt at least five Korean words. And in 1993 a cat called Cingene (Gypsy) from Izmir clearly spoke at least seven Turkish words on television including *ver* (give), *Nalan* (a girl's name), *Derya* (another girl's name), *demem* ('I don't say'), *naynay* (baby talk for music), *nine* (colloquial word for grandmother) and *babaanne* (formal word for grandmother). Our Turkish correspondent Izzet Goksu told us the words were clearly audible. In the very early days, FT published a 1968 news report about Pala, another cat that could speak Turkish.

way that involves improvising around one of the tunes. Bowhead 'music' contrasts with that of the humpback, which produces melodious and less various songs common to each male population. "If humpback whale song is like classical music, bowheads are jazz," said lead researcher Dr Kate Stafford from the University of Washington in Seattle. "The sound is more freeform. And when we looked through four winters of acoustic data, not only were there never any song types repeated between years, but each season had a new set of songs. It was astonishing; bowhead whales were singing loudly, 24 hours a day, from November until April. And they were singing many, many different songs." It is not known if it is only the males that sing, whether any of their songs are shared between individuals or why their tunes continually change – or indeed why they sing in the first place. Could it be courtship or maybe territorial defence? Bowheads (so called because of their huge domed skulls) have the largest mouth of any animal. They can weigh up to 100 tons and live for up to 200 years. Once hunted to near-extinction, there are now an estimated 10,000 worldwide. The research is published in the Royal Society journal *Biology Letters*. *D.Mail*, *Metro*, 4 April 2018.



# ALL WHITE ON THE NIGHT

There are approximately 350,000 moose in Sweden but very few white ones. The whiteness is not due to albinism but is a form of genetic variation, and these dark-eyed animals are accepted by their brown counterparts. Most white moose can be found in the west of Sweden, in the provinces of Värmland and Bohuslän. This striking example was photographed in Arvika, Värmland, in 2016. More recently, another white moose (or perhaps the same one) has been photographed in the province by Swedish politician Hans Nilsson; see p20 for this and other unusual white animals. PHOTO: Anders Tedeholm/imagebank.sweden.se.





## SIDELINES...

### HAUNTED CROSSROADS

Last November, motorists were warned to avoid an intersection on the Petchkasem Highway in Naratiwat, Thailand, known locally as “The Crossroads of the Possessed”. After a series of accidents and mysterious events – such as steering wheels being yanked by invisible forces and ghosts seen by the side of the road clutching their knees – 100 locals conducted an exorcism to try and banish the evil spirits. *thailvisa.com*, 10 Nov 2017.

### OCCULT SURGE

The number of faith healers and fortune-tellers in Italy has risen fivefold since the global economic crisis in 2008. About 13 million Italians – a quarter of the adult population – visit astrologers, soothsayers, Tarot card readers and the like annually – three million more than in 2001 – leading to a rise in diabolical possession (according to the Church). *D.Telegraph*, 3 Oct 2017.

### PLANTAGENET RELIC

An antique dealer bought a box of 1930s memorabilia from a country house clearance. Included was a Latin manuscript, being a rare set of accounts from 1483, ordered by Richard III from his lands and property in the Duchy of Cornwall. This was to be sold at auction in Exeter on 21 March. *D.Telegraph*, 28 Feb 2018.

### RAT IN CAT

Vets performing life-saving surgery on a cat were shocked to find it had swallowed a black rat whole. It was 7in (18cm) long, not counting the tail. The microchipped, nine-year-old pet cat called Rosie had turned up lost at a house in Strenshall, near York, with a hard and swollen stomach. *D.Telegraph*, 18 Dec 2017.



MARTIN ROSS

## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Updates on stories from previous issues



### BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS

[FT341:23]



On 9 February, a man and a woman who pretended to be government caseworkers from the Department of Family and Community Service (FACS) sent to do a welfare check on a mother's six-month-old twins were let into her house in Karabar, near Queanbeyan in New South Wales, after producing a fake identity card. After checking the children and their bedroom, they left. The woman soon became suspicious and contacted the Queanbeyan FACS, who confirmed there was no record of the visit, and the matter was reported to police, who issued composite images of the suspects (above). Both were “of Caucasian appearance”. The man was in his 30s, with short dark hair and a prominent nose, dressed in a “business shirt and trousers”. The woman, in her 20s, had a tanned complexion, medium-length curly hair with a dyed streak and was wearing an orange blazer with a dark-coloured skirt. *news.com.au*, 14 Feb; (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 15 Feb 2018.

### SONIC WARFARE OR MASS HYSTERIA? [FT363:4]



The physicians treating the 21 or 24 patients involved in the so-called ‘sonic attack’ on staff at the US Embassy in Cuba have released their preliminary findings in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (15 Feb 2018). While the authors claim that

all 21 suffered concussion-like symptoms without head trauma, their study is highly descriptive, remarkably vague, and makes claims that are not supported by the data. To their credit, the JAMA editors published an accompanying editorial by neurologists Dr Christopher Muth and Steven Lewis, and a separate commentary by medical reporter Rita Rubin. Both are very cautious and highlight serious criticisms of the study's claims. The study is inconclusive at best; all of the symptoms have plausible alternative explanations. Claims of “white matter tract” changes and “concussion-like symptoms” are very much open to alternative interpretations and the evidence is far from clear-cut.

There are a host of problems with this study, not the least of which is their dismissal of the possibility of mass psychogenic illness. As Dr Robert Bartholomew has shown, some types of mass psychogenic illness begin slowly and persist for months or years. Dr Douglas H Smith, director of the Center for Brain Injury and Repair at the University of Pennsylvania and co-author of the JAMA study, said that mass psychogenic illness was unlikely because not everyone knew everyone else in the cohort, and “there were cases where some individuals had no idea that anyone else was affected.” However, as British psychiatrist Simon Wessely has pointed out, MPI can spread without people meeting. The key is whether or not they knew that others were becoming ill and/or

knew that there was a suspicion that sonic weapons, etc were involved. Crucially, the social networking aspect of the cohort was left out of the JAMA study. *psychologytoday.com*, 16 Feb; *NY Times* (Int. edition), 20 Feb 2018.

### ALL FALL DOWN [FT363:4]

On 1 February, 143 workers fainted at the Senduno Knitting factory in Cambodia and nine were sent to the provincial hospital; the previous afternoon, nearly 100 workers had fainted in Takéo province's Bati district. Some of the Senduno workers who fainted had also keeled over two days earlier, when 86 female workers had succumbed. Soun Vannak, a provincial National Social Security Fund (NSSF) official, blamed the faintings on pesticides that farmers had been spraying on their rice fields. According to an NSSF report, the number of workers in Cambodia fainting in 2017 decreased 28 per cent compared with 2016, with incidents happening in 18 factories around the country. A total of 1,160 workers fainted in 2017, all but one of whom were women. *Khmer Times*, 2 Feb 2018.

### AMELIA EARHART [FT322:16]



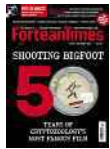
Richard Janz, a former director of the University of Tennessee's Forensic Anthropology Center, writing in *Forensic Anthropology* in February, describes new research into the human remains discovered in 1940 on Gardner Island (a coral atoll in the Pacific now called Nikumaroro) and misidentified at the time by Dr David Hoodless as the bones of a stocky, middle-aged male. Based on bone measurement analysis, Janz is almost certain that the Nikumaroro castaway was Amelia Earhart, whose plane disappeared in the area in 1937. The report states that his analysis “reveals that Earhart is more similar to the Nikumaroro bones than 99% of individuals





in a large reference sample.” However, some researchers continue to believe that the aviatrix survived and became a prisoner of the Japanese. *Economist*, 10 Feb; *Science Daily*, 7 Mar; *BBC News*, 8 Mar; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 9 Mar 2018.

## SAVING THE WORLD [FT360:26]



In 1983, Stanislav Petrov almost certainly saved the world from Armageddon when he refused to launch Soviet missiles in response to an imagined US attack. Vasili Arkhipov averted a similar disaster 21 years earlier. Last October, the submarine officer was honoured by the US-based Future of Life Institute, which gave a £38,000 prize to his grandson. Arkhipov was on board submarine B-59 near Cuba on 27 October 1962 when US forces began dropping non-lethal depth charges. The action was designed to encourage Soviet subs to surface, but B-59's crew had been incommunicado and thought they were witnessing the start of World War III. Trapped in the sweltering sub – the air conditioning was not working – they feared death. Unknown to US forces, they had a 10-kilotonne nuclear torpedo and had permission to launch it without waiting for approval from Moscow. Two of the vessel's senior officers – including the captain, Valentin Savitsky – wanted to fire the missile, but all three had to agree. Arkhipov refused to sanction the launch and calmed the captain down. *Guardian*, 28 Oct 2017.

## PURLOINED PENIS PANIC [FT323:24]



A man in Zimbabwe caused a huge ruckus at a popular shrine after he accused a prophet of making his penis disappear. Kudzai Chihota came to the shrine on 5 January and accused Madzibaba Stephen of making his wang disappear and “leaving him with testicles”. Chihota had earlier visited the shrine seeking to ‘lock’ his wife after he was told she was cheating on him – but



COURTESY ALEX MERRILL / ASP BOOKS

## WHO PUT BELLA IN THE WYCH ELM? [FT364:34-41]



The face of the mystery woman whose skeleton was found in the hollow of a tree in Hagley Woods in the West Midlands in 1943 can now be seen for the first time after it was digitally recreated by a team from Liverpool John Moore's University, led by Professor Caroline Wilkinson, a specialist in the craniofacial depiction of people from the past. The picture appears in a new book on the mystery by Pete and Alex Merrill. *Halesowen Chronicle*, 8 Mar 2018.

this backfired after he was caught cheating on his wife and his organ vanished (or so he claimed) while he was caressing his girlfriend. “What I want from Madzibaba Stephen is to restore my manhood and refund my money,” he said. The prophet's aides prevented him from accessing the spiritual leader and he was taken to a police station where he was referred to a local hospital. *sde.co.ke (Nairobi)*, 9 Jan 2018.

## HEAVENLY MISSILES [FT365:20-21]



Luce Rameau was in bed in Miami talking on the phone on 28 February when she thought she heard a bomb go off. The next instant she was covered in debris from

a hole in her roof created by an uninflated six-man raft that had fallen from a Royal Canadian Air Force search-and-rescue helicopter. The RCAF CH-146 Griffon helicopter was returning to US Coast Guard Air Station Miami in Opa Locka, Florida. Canada's airforce was on a training exercise to practise carrying out rescue missions over water. The 2ft (61cm) long raft weighed about 80lb (36kg) and fell into Ms Rameau's bedroom. “The occupant narrowly escaped disaster and sustained only minor injuries,” said a Fire and Rescue Department spokesperson. Air force spokeswoman Jessica Lamirande said: “It is unclear exactly how or why this happened but the matter is now under investigation.” *BBC News*, 1 Mar 2018.

## SIDELINES...

### DUMB AND DUMBER

In 2005 a Chinese man sur-named Zheng murdered his wife's uncle in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. He escaped, called himself Wang Gui and pretended to be mute. He settled in Anhui province, worked in construction, remarried and fathered a child, while not uttering a word. In 2017 a household survey by police revealed his lack of ID and a DNA test showed his real identity. Arrested, he found he was unable to speak as his vocal cords had atrophied. *Oddity Central*, 27 Dec; *Sunday People*, 31 Dec 2017.

### PULL THE OTHER ONE

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has revealed the strangest excuses taxpayers have used for filing late tax returns. One claimed that his wife had been seeing aliens and would not let him enter the house; another that his ex-wife had left the tax return upstairs and he couldn't retrieve it because he suffered from vertigo. *[R]* 17 Jan 2018.

### TROUSER SNAKE

A 19-year-old man was detained for drunken behaviour on 7 November after a reported altercation with another man in the German city of Darmstadt led to complaints. While searching him, police officers noticed a “significant bulge in his trousers” and found he had a 35cm (14in) baby king python in his underpants. He was taken to a police cell for the night to sober up. It was unclear whether “the non-species-appropriate transport” contravened animal protection regulations. *[AP]* *BBC News*, *Guardian*, 8 Nov; *Times*, 9 Nov 2017.

### MOOSE'S REVENGE

Rodney Buffett fired two shots at a massive bull moose 200m (650ft) away in woods near Grand Bank, Newfoundland, on 7 October last. The moose dropped, and Buffett ran over to inspect the wounded animal. It got to its feet and charged, piercing his skin and thrashing around its 14-point antlers. It threw him in the air and trampled over him several times, leaving a hoof-shaped bruise on his forehead before running off. Buffett's wounds were stitched and his punctured ribs stapled. *Times Colonist (Victoria, BC)*, 11 Oct 2017.





## SIDELINES...

### HEAVIEST WOMAN

Eman Ahmed Abd El Aty, 37, an Egyptian woman once believed to be the world's heaviest, died in the United Arab Emirates on 25 September. After bariatric weight loss surgery in India she had lost more than 300kg (661lb) of her 500kg (1,102lb), but died from heart disease and kidney dysfunction. Before the surgery, she had not left her house for 25 years. *BBC News*, 25 Sept 2017.

### FAILED COVER-UP

On 29 December 2016, Joseph Talbot, 43, was arrested for drunk driving in Wayne County, New York, and his mugshot appeared in the *Wayne County Times* (circulation 12,000) on New Year's Eve. In an attempt to keep his shame secret, Talbot followed the paper's deliveryman and bought nearly 1,000 copies of the paper at \$1.25 each. This backfired spectacularly: the story was picked up by several national news outlets. *[AP]* 4 Jan 2017.

### CAMEL SCANDAL

A new hospital exclusively for camels opened in Dubai in December, and 12 camels were disqualified from Saudi Arabia's annual camel beauty contest after receiving Botox injections to make their pouts look more alluring. The month-long festival involves up to 30,000 camels, and its profile was raised by relocating it from the desert to the outskirts of Riyadh. The lure of £22.6m in prize money tempted some owners to cheat. *D.Telegraph*, 15 Dec 2017; *the-guardian.com*, 24 Jan 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

## BALLISTIC BIRDS

Falling starling mystery, owl deaths, goose missile and a fatal pheasant



DRAPER ANIMAL SERVICE

• More than 200 starlings fell from the sky onto a street in Draper, Utah, on 29 January 2018. People on social media speculated that aliens were to blame – or the flock was poisoned or hit by lightning. “No aliens, no cloaking device,” said Sergeant Chad Carpenter of the city police. “No poison, it was just one of those freak things where the birds were just flying along, crashed into the side of a large vehicle and boom!” Whether it was misdirection or weather related, something caused the lead starling to crash and thanks to the breeds’ tandem flying, the rest followed. While most of the birds were killed, 17 survived and were transferred to a local rehabilitation centre. *fox13now.com*, 30 Jan 2018.

• Dozens of dead barn owls were found along Interstate-84 in southern Idaho on 10 February 2017. Nichole Miller and Christina White of Boise were driving home to Boise from Twin Falls when they spotted more than 50 dead owls during a 20-mile stretch near Jerome. Mike Keckler, Idaho Fish and Game spokesman, explained that hungry barn owls become victims of road kill when they target mice along the Interstate. “It almost looks like they fell from the sky,” Miller said. Boise



State University student Erin Arnold, who recently published a thesis on Southern Idaho's owl deaths, described I-84 as having “one of the world's highest roadway mortality rates for barn owls”. *KBOI News (Idaho)*, 13 Feb 2017; *raptorresearchcenter.boisestate.edu/arnold-erin/*

• Thousands of dead and dying bees washed up on a popular beach in Naples, Florida, on 7 February 2017. Naples residents said the problem started a few days earlier. They were both concerned and confused. “Why are there bees? Where are they coming from? And why are they in a very specific area of the beach?” asked Martha Duff. A bee expert said seeing bees wash up on a beach was very unusual. He speculated it might have

LEFT: Some of the 200 dead starlings on a street in Draper, Utah. BELOW: Erin Arnold examining a dead barn owl on Idaho's I-84. BELOW LEFT: Robert Meilhammer poses with a dead turkey; a Canada goose later exacted revenge.



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

been anything from a nearby pesticide spraying forcing them to the water or a swarm flying overhead that became exhausted and flew into the water. *[NBC]* 8 Feb 2017.

• On 1 February, Robert Meilhammer, 51, of Crapo, Maryland, was hunting for waterfowl in Easton, near the Miles River, with three others when someone in the group fired on a flock of Canada geese overhead. One of the geese fell and hit Meilhammer, knocking him out and causing severe head and facial injuries. The dead goose also knocked out two of his teeth. He was airlifted to hospital. The bird weighed between 10lb and 14lb (4.5-6.4kg). *washingtonpost.com*, 2 Feb; *BBC News*, 3 Feb 2018.

• A pheasant killed a motorcyclist when it hit his helmet at a combined speed of 60mph (100km/h). Robert Patterson, 51, of Llandudno Junction, Gwynedd, fractured his skull when the 6lb (2.7kg) bird flew out of a hedgerow on a country road in Wales last November. “It was a significant impact,” said a pathologist at the inquest in Caernarvon. “It was instant death.” Patterson suffered further injuries as his bike went into a bank. *D.Telegraph*, 22 Feb 2018.



# GREAT OUTDOORS

A hundred trees take a tumble and a skier loses six days of his life...



CLIFF MASS

ABOVE: One of more than 100 massive old-growth trees felled by the mystery wind of 27 January.

## WASHINGTON WIPEOUT

In the early morning hours of 27 January, an extremely powerful force knocked down over 100 trees along the north shore of Lake Quinalt on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. High winds or some other meteorological phenomenon were immediately assumed to be the cause. The tree fall was first reported by Bill Bacchus, chief scientist of Olympic National Park, writing to meteorologist Cliff Mass. He described massive old-growth trees splayed out in a semi-circular pattern. Most appeared to be wind-thrown, but many were broken off near the base. The damage was inconsistent; in some areas nearly every tree was down, but most of the affected area seemed to have lost about 40-60 per cent of its standing trees. Near the drainage outlet, the trees seemed to have fallen southeast, while the western edge trees were oriented more north/south. In the eastern edge, the trees were closer to east/west.

Cliff Mass combed through all available meteorological data, looking for any wind patterns or microbursts. He noticed that whatever caused the trees to fall, it was also powerful enough to trigger a localised seismic event picked up only by the sensors nearest to the epicentre of the tree fall. However, weather data showed nothing anomalous: no

extreme changes in temperature or dew point, low wind speeds, and pressure following a weak downward trend. There was a front of warm air flowing in from the south, but such fronts are not usually known to cause dangerous microbursts. On his blog, Mass wrote that the incident remained a total mystery: the trees fell to the south or southeast, implying a very strong northerly wind. None of the surface locations showed strong wind and most of them were in the 'wrong' direction. There was no strong convection or thunderstorms, so no microbursts. The whole thing remains obstinately mysterious. *mysteriousuniverse.org*, 12 Feb 2018.

## SKIER MYSTERY

Toronto firefighter Constantinos "Danny" Filippidis, 49, doesn't know what happened after he was reported missing on 7 February from Whiteface Mountain, Wilmington, New York State, during an annual ski trip with colleagues. His belongings were found at the lodge and his car was still in the parking lot. Hundreds of volunteers spent about 7,000 hours searching for him, some combing the snow by hand. The Department of Homeland Security, New York State Police, New York Department of Conservation, United States

Customs and Border Protection and officials in Toronto assisted with the search, with the aid of helicopters and K-9s.

Six days later, on 13 February, Filippidis turned up in Sacramento, California, some 2,900 miles (4,700km) west of the Adirondacks, still in ski clothes, including helmet and goggles. Frank Ramagnano, president of the Toronto Professional Firefighters' Association, said that Filippidis appeared to be "confused and was unable to give direct answers. He had phoned [his wife] and called her by a nickname. She quickly recognised the voice. Then they lost contact and he contacted her again and they kept him on the phone and asked him to call 911 to get him help as soon as possible." Ramagnano said Filippidis did not have a history of mental illness or substance abuse. Filippidis remembered little, but thought he'd suffered a head injury, rode in a "big rig-style truck" and slept "a lot", Sgt. Shaun Hampton of the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department told the *Post-Standard* of Syracuse. Filippidis said he bought an iPhone to call his wife and told deputies that a truck dropped him off in downtown Sacramento, where he got a haircut. *[AP] mynbc5.com*, 14 Feb; *boston.com*, 15 Feb 2018.

## SIDELINES...

### RHODODENRON RESCUE

In February 2017, Michael Healy-Rae TD told the Dail (Irish parliament) that the army should be deployed to stop "aggressive" rhododendrons "taking over" Killybeg National Park, County Kerry. On 14 September, air, mountain and water rescue teams were called to rescue two campers lost for nearly three hours in the 8,700-acre *Rhododendron ponticum* plantation. A helicopter guided them to the shore of Lough Leane, where they were rescued by boat. *D.Telegraph*, 23 Feb; *BBC News*, 15 Sept 2017.

### TRYING IT ON

Sebastian Tomczak, based in Australia, who made a 10-hour video of continuous white noise in 2015 and uploaded it to YouTube, has had five copyright infringement claims made against him, including one by publishers of white noise intended for sleep therapy. The claims were not demanding the video's removal, merely a cut of any revenue made from advertising associated with it. Tomczak said he would fight the "spurious" claims. *BBC News*, 5 Jan 2018.

### JET BLAG

A homeless woman sneaked onto a British Airways flight in Chicago's O'Hare International Airport and flew to Heathrow before being arrested. Eight times Marilyn Hartmann, 66, had boarded planes without a ticket and flown (for instance) from Los Angeles to San Jose and Minnesota to Jacksonville. FT correspondent Janet Wilson commented: "It does show how invisible women over 50 are." *Sunday People*, 21 Jan 2018.

### HUGE XMAS PRESENT

A man who chanced upon €300,000 (£268,000) after leaning on a door at Charles de Gaulle airport in France is thought to have been homeless. He was seen rummaging through bins on security footage and recognised as one of many people who slept rough near the airport. The door of the Loomis cash management company in terminal 2F had been left unlocked and the man, in his fifties, walked back out with two bags of cash. He was still at large at the time of the report. *BBC News*, 13 Dec 2017.





## SIDELINES...

### ACTUALLY BROTHERS

After more than 60 years of close friendship, Walter Macfarlane, 74, and Alan Robinson, 72, who live in Hawaii, discovered through DIY ancestry kits that they were biological brothers. Their mother Genevieve had given both boys up for adoption, but they met at elementary school. Later, Macfarlane's children called Robinson "Uncle Alan", despite no one being aware he really was. *Times*, 30 Dec 2017.

### O LUCKY MEN

Amateur golfers Michael Bidmead (72) and Milos Bilic (51) beat odds of more than 17-million-to-one by hitting consecutive holes-in-one just seconds apart at the Oxford Golf Club's 15th hole, a 201-yard par three. Both used a six-iron. Bilic teed off first, but because the green is in a dip the players couldn't see how his ball ended up. A third member of the club had aced the same hole earlier in the day. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Express*, 29 Dec 2017.

### CHIRPY PROTEIN

Finnish baker Fazer has launched what it said was the world's first insect-based bread to be offered to consumers. It is made from flour ground from dried crickets as well as wheat flour and seeds, and contains more protein than normal wheat bread. Each loaf contains about 70 crickets and costs €3.99. *Irish Times*, 24 Nov 2017.

### INFERNAL MACHINE

A 60-year-old Massey Ferguson tractor belonging to Horace Camp of Guernsey mysteriously started up twice during a thunderstorm and once set fire to a field, earning it the nickname "The Devil". *D.Star*, 31 July 2017.



MARTIN ROSS

## BENTHAM IN THE USA

Philosopher's preserved body heads to America



PHOTOS: UCL CULTURE

LEFT: Preparing Bentham's "auto-icon" for its transatlantic trip.

a large stocking over the body, but the stuffing has lost its shape. "When you have an old sofa, everything settles into the bottom and you have to plump up the cushions," said Subhadra Das, a curator at UCL. "Well, the same thing happened with Bentham. We have not added anything, but reapportioned where it is, so he looks a lot slimmer." The philosopher's actual head was recently on temporary display at UCL, and DNA samples were taken to test the hypothesis that he may have had Asperger's or autism. After a mummification error, the head was deemed too distasteful to show and is now usually kept in a safe. It is removed once a year to check that the skin and hair are not falling off. For years, Bentham carried in his pocket the blue glass eyes that were to adorn it.

Bentham defined as the "fundamental axiom" of his philosophy the principle that "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong". He opposed slavery and capital punishment and championed prison reform, relief of poverty, women's rights, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and animal welfare. He was notably eccentric, reclusive and difficult to get hold of. He called his walking stick Dapple, his teapot Dickey, and kept an elderly cat named The Reverend Sir John Langbourne. A staunch atheist, he described church teachings as "nonsense on stilts".

The New York exhibition, *Life Like: Sculpture, Color and the Body*, on until 22 July 2018, documents sculptural practice from 14th century Europe to the present, and brings together works from Donatello and El Greco to Bourgeois and Koons. A 360-degree rotatable, high-resolution 'Virtual Auto-Icon' is available at the UCL Bentham Project's website. *D.Telegraph*, 3 Oct 2017, 14 Feb 2018; *Sunday People*, 25 Feb 2018.

Jeremy Bentham, the English philosopher, social reformer and founder of utilitarianism, decreed that his body be preserved after his death in 1832 as an "auto-icon". This has been on display ever since in the South Cloister at University College London. It is periodically wheeled into meetings of the College Council, where it/he is noted in the minutes as "present but not voting". Now for the first time the strange manikin – comprising skeleton, wax head, clothes, hat, chair and walking stick – is to leave UCL for the Met Breuer museum in Madison Avenue, New York. It was always Bentham's ambition to visit America, but one he never achieved until now.

The skeleton is padded with wood shavings, held in place by

*He kept an elderly cat named the Reverend Sir John Langbourne*





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# Complicated Cold War chemistry

DAVID HAMBLING sifts the evidence concerning the likely origin of the Salisbury nerve agent attack

The first indication that anything strange was going on in Salisbury on 4 March was when a witness noticed two people slumped on a park bench. The man was making “odd movements” and the witness thought they looked pretty “out of it” on some powerful drugs. She was right, but not in the way she thought. The pair, former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia, had been poisoned with a rare and potent nerve agent (see **FT365:2+5**).

The first responder on the scene, police officer DS Nick Bailey, was also affected. He has since been released from hospital, but at the time of writing the Skripals are still in a coma. At least 20 other people were treated for exposure. The delivery method is not known; one theory is that the agent was introduced into the ventilation system of the Skripals' car. It was carried around on their clothing, contaminating everything around them, until it overcame them.

Forensic analysis identified the agent as a type known as Novichok. This is Russian for ‘newcomer’, a broad, non-technical term for a class of agents developed in the Soviet Union from the 1970s. The aim was an undetectable chemical weapon that would defeat gas masks. At least four different versions were weaponised, but the properties of hundreds of other compounds were explored.

Details of the Novichok project were leaked in 1992 by two Russian chemists who were concerned about environmental effects around the research site. The agents are extremely toxic, with a lethal dose measured in micrograms; a pinhead-sized quantity can kill. Like other nerve agents, they work by interfering with the nervous system, producing muscle spasms which escalate until the victim cannot breathe and their heart stops.

The Salisbury attack bore the same hallmarks as the assassination of the Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006 (**FT218:4-5, 220:4, 325:5**). This was another poisoning carried out in a public place with considerable contamination of the area, this time with radioactive Polonium. Litvinenko died in hospital after three agonising weeks. A subsequent British government inquiry pointed the finger squarely at Russian intelligence agencies and suggested the assassination may have been approved by President Putin himself.

Suspicion immediately fell on Russia for the Novichok incident. The Russian authorities denied all knowledge and pointed out that Porton Down – Britain's



LEFT: The State Scientific Research Institute of Organic Chemistry and Technology, in Moscow, where Novichok was developed during the 1970s and '80s.

chemical warfare research laboratory – is just a few miles from Salisbury. They also requested samples of the poison to confirm its identity. A sample does not seem to have been supplied to Russia, but the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has sent a team to investigate. This will provide an independent view on whether the chemical used is indeed Novichok.

Many thought the attack looked like a brazen act of state assassination, with the chemical fingerprints of Russian intelligence all over it. Coming just before the Russian presidential election, it reinforced former KGB-chief Putin's hard-line stance on traitors and willingness to flex international muscles. However, some commentators were more cautious, suggesting that the attack could have been carried out by someone else to incriminate Russia, or even by Russian mafia.

No other nation is known to have made Novichok agents in weapons quantities. Craig Murray, the maverick former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, has claimed that Iran also made them. However, a check of the scientific documents Murray references reveals that the Iranians only made microscopic quantities to be examined via mass spectrometer. This was done with the awareness of the OPCW so that Novichok can be more easily identified. The hazards of making these agents mean they did not attempt to manufacture them in large quantity.

I talked to some chemical warfare experts who explained that Novichoks have

complicated chemistry. When they were first revealed it was difficult to manufacture samples to test. This is the significance of the Iranian work: nobody else had made them and put the chemicals through a mass spectrometer before. Manufacturing larger quantities requires a lab with exceptional safety equipment, which effectively means a government facility. Given that the ‘recipe’ is out there, Porton Down, or its US equivalent, might conceivably have made such an agent, but there is no evidence they have ever done so.

Russian media have suggested that some former Soviet state might have retained some Novichok from before the breakup of the Soviet Union. However, the agents are unstable, and the decay products accelerate its deterioration. The shelf life is only a few years. Even if Russian Mafia are behind the attack, the Russian government would still need to explain why their labs are making Novichok and how criminals acquired it.

PM Teresa May claims to have classified intelligence that the Russians have stockpiled Novichok, although this is impossible to verify. The Russians boldly counter-claimed that the British have made and stockpiled Novichok themselves. Anyone can make this type of claim about anyone; the issue is increasingly one of who to believe in a polarised world of ‘alternative facts’.

As well as the Litvinenko assassination, there was the killing of Kim Jong-nam, half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, with the nerve agent VX. In such cases the killings were not carried out by criminals but by state actors and appear to have been motivated by reasons of state. Finding alternative culprits and motives for the Skripals is a challenge for those not deeply involved in hardcore conspiracy circles.

We need to keep an open mind in this case, and see what the OPCW and further forensic investigation turns up. Further twists are certainly possible, but at present the Novichok incident looks like a smirking killer standing beside the body of a victim, a knife with his initials embedded in its back, and noting that we cannot prove anything.

The international community has reacted with a mass expulsion of Russian ‘diplomats,’ a term which covers intelligence agents. This is a gamble given the current lack of absolute proof that Russian intelligence was behind the incident. But it might just prevent signature attacks with chemical weapons in the future.

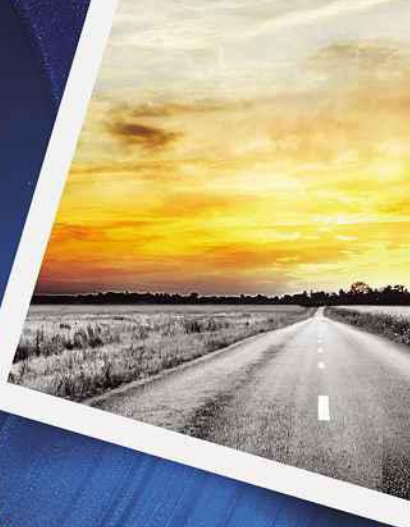


# Joe Browns

**FREE  
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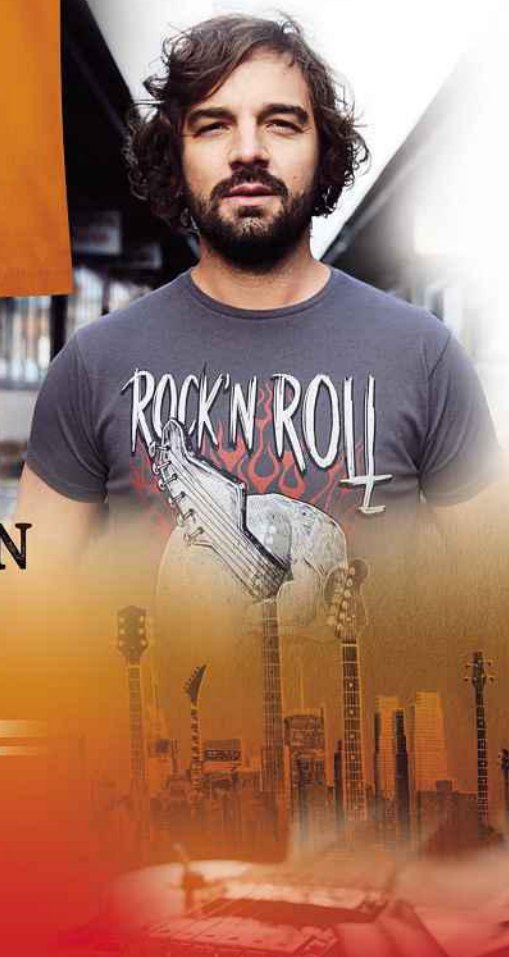
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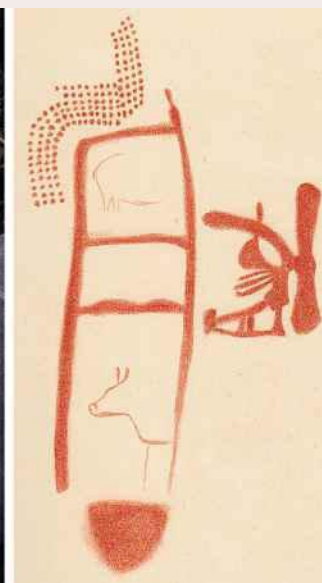
## PAUL SIEVEKING digs up the latest evidence about our not-so-stupid Neanderthal forebears

### HOMO STUPIDUS?

- The first Neanderthal remains were found near Düsseldorf in the Neander river valley in 1856. In 1864 the Irish geologist Dr William King declared it a species of human with the name *Homo neanderthalis*, in preference to the alternative offered by German biologist Ernst Haeckel – *Homo stupidus*. The misleading image of a knuckle-dragging oaf was emphasised by the reconstruction of the first complete Neanderthal skeleton, found at La Chapelle-aux-Saints in 1911 by the French palaeontologist Pierre Boule, which exhibited a curved spine, a stoop, bent knees, and a head and hips jutting forward. In 1957 it was shown that this individual had suffered from a grossly deforming type of osteoarthritis. Typical Neanderthals had barrel chests, broad projecting noses and bigger brains than modern humans, but couldn't run as fast and were shorter and less adept at using tools. What they lacked in height they made up for in strength – females had bigger biceps than the average male human today [FT266:21].

Studies of the human genome indicate that *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals interbred, and about 2-4 per cent of the genome of non-Africans today is derived from Neanderthals, including particularly a rich concentration of genes involved in hair and skin – which might have helped us adapt to the harsh new Eurasian environments they were used to living in. On the minus side, Neanderthal genes are also responsible for our susceptibility to type 2 diabetes, Crohn's disease and our addiction to smoking. *D.Telegraph, 1 Mar 2014.*

- As water seeps into caves, it may deposit mineral crusts on the walls known as flowstones. These contain uranium, which slowly decays into thorium at a known rate, so a flowstone covering cave art can give a minimum age. Art in three Spanish caves, up to 435 miles (700km) apart, was created around 20,000 years before evidence of *Homo sapiens* arriving in Europe. A ladder-shaped (scaleriform) drawing on a cave wall in La Pasiega, Cantabria, is at least 64,800 years old; a stencilled hand print in Maltravieso cave in western Spain is at least 66,700 years old; while at the Ardales cave near Malaga stalagmites and stalactites were painted red at least 65,500 years ago. These dates indicate the artists were



LEFT: A ladder-shaped drawing on a cave wall in La Pasiega, Cantabria.

monk seals and shellfish. There is evidence that mussels were warmed to open their shells. [FT272:40].

- Neanderthals routinely cared for the injured or infirm over extended periods. A girl with a congenital brain abnormality was not abandoned but lived until five or six years old, while a man in his 40s from Shanidar cave, known as Shanidar 1 or Nandy, had an amputated right forearm, deformed feet and blindness in one eye and must have been looked after for many years [FT272:40]. *D.Telegraph, 25 Oct 2017.*

Neanderthal, although no actual Neanderthal bones have been found in the caves. Whether these hominid cousins created figurative art is as yet uncertain: there are animals painted within the rungs of the La Pasiega ladder, but these have yet to be dated and could be more recent. Paintings of seals in the Nerja cave near Malaga may be Neanderthal [FT288:22], as may deep grooves in Gorham's Cave, Gibraltar, and the recent finds add to mounting evidence that Neanderthal intellectual capabilities have been underestimated. Stalagmites were arranged in circles in the Bruniquel Cave near Toulouse, southwest France, about 176,500 years ago – is this evidence of Neanderthal ritual building? [FT343:14]. Neanderthal jewellery – painted and pierced seashells found in the Aviones sea cave in southeast Spain – was made between 115,000 and 118,000 years ago. The oldest known shell jewellery made by *Homo sapiens* – found in a South African cave – is only about 70,000 years old. *BBC News, Guardian, D.Mail, Metro, <i>23 Feb; NY Times (int. edition), 28 Feb 2018.*

- Particles trapped in the dental calculus on Neanderthal teeth from 40,000 BP excavated from Shanidar Cave in Iraqi Kurdistan and Spy Cave near Charleroi in Belgium suggested they ate woolly rhinoceros, sheep, and a wide variety of plants including date palms, beans, roots, tubers, mushrooms and grains such as barley – and the grains showed evidence of cooking. Neanderthals living on Gibraltar ate deer, wild boar, bear, mountain goat, rabbit, quail, duck, pigeon, and tortoise. They also consumed seafood when it was available, including dolphin,

- Ephedra, a natural stimulant, has been found in another Neanderthal grave in Shanidar – some of the earliest evidence for the use of mood-altering plants. And in Europe, analysis of DNA in dental calculus suggests sick Neanderthals self-medicated with naturally occurring painkillers and antibiotics. A team from the University of Adelaide studied two 48,000-year-old Neanderthal individuals from El Sidrón in Asturias, Spain, showing they ate moss, bark and mushrooms. One of the two – a teenage boy – had a large dental abscess. He also had a diarrhoea-causing gut parasite. Previous studies suggested he was eating plants with anti-inflammatory properties. The new study also finds DNA sequences of poplar plants, known to contain the natural pain killer salicylic acid (the active ingredient in aspirin). And there was DNA from *Penicillium* fungus – the source of penicillin – in his dental calculus. However, it is difficult to say for sure whether he consumed the fungus as a Palaeolithic antibiotic. *Penicillium* grows naturally on plant material as it turns mouldy, so he could have eaten it by chance. However, it was only found in the dental calculus of the sick teenager – none was found in the calculus of the second El Sidrón individual, who evidently led a healthy life. They might have realised that mouldy grains had curative properties, but this is not proven. Aspirin was first synthesised in 1890, although eating willow or poplar bark had long been recognised as an analgesic. Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928. *newscientist.com, Times, D.Mail, 9 Mar; Times, 13 May 2017.* For more on Neanderthals, see **FT272:38-44, 306:17, 347:12.**



# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 224: CULINARY CLASSICS

“Food falls from the sky” – Fort, Books, p554

Forget Nigella – difficult, I know. Message to Delia – *Norwich!* Jamie O? – the Naked and the Bread. And may Gordon R forever burn in Hell’s Kitchen.

Older *FT* gastronomes will remember the avuncular Philip Harben and the preposterous Fannie Cradock – still cooking on YouTube. But let this column take you back to the tastes, wastes, and waist-lines of Greece and Rome. Too many sources to itemise. Athenæus and the Elder Pliny dominate, with imperial biographers Suetonius and the *Augustan History* also strong contenders. JC McKeown, *Roman Curiosities* (2010, rev. **FT268:58**) serves up a rich menu of names and references. From the cornucopia of modern works, try Ilaria Gozzini Giacosa’s – onomastic mouthful, that – *A Taste of Ancient Rome*, 1992.

Biggest gastro-Greek was Sicilian Archestratus (c. 330 BC), of whose poem *The Life of Luxury* 62 fragments are quoted in Athenæus’s *Learned Men at Dinner* – print and electronic translations available. Not so much the first cookbook as the first food blog. The occasional kitchen hints are swamped by his extravagant ‘menuese’ rhapsodies over what is best from where – he is to blame for the pretentious nonsense dished up by modern eateries, best remedies for which are the two ‘Trip’ mickey-taking films.

Archestratus had a bad ancient press. “He sailed around the world for his belly’s sake”; “He is ignorant of most things, and tells us nothing” – both quoted by Athenæus, who also agrees with Stoic philosopher Chrysippus’s denunciation of his book as being as morally corrupting as Philænis’s sex manual – take heart from the Tom Jones eating sequence.

Isidore of Seville (now patron saint of the Internet) credited Apicius with the first cookbook. Not true. They are mentioned by comic playwright Plautus (3rd-2nd cents. BC). But Marcus Gavius Apicius was doyen of the Roman gourmet-gourmand tradition. So much so that Greek grammarian Apion devoted a (now lost) book to his gluttony. Apicius flourished in Tiberius’s reign (AD 14-37). Anecdotes by various writers include his rushing to Libya to sample their fabled



shrimps, only to find them disappointing and sail back home, plus his advice to drown mullets before cooking in a bath of fish sauce (Garum/Liquamen – fish stock made from putrid fish, ancestor of Worcester Sauce) to heighten their flavour.

Having eaten through most of his vast fortune, realising he was down to his last 10 million, Apicius poisoned himself to avoid the prospect of living on hard tack. There’s an unverifiable claim that he chose the poetic irony of self-starvation, as did (e.g.) the epic poet Silius Italicus – readers of his *Punica* often wish he’d done this before writing it.

The recipe collection *De Re Coquinaria* that bears his name was actually put together several centuries later. Its attribution proves his reputation as the first ‘celeb foodie’. Big-name endorsement was another regrettable Roman innovation. Scribonius Largus (one of Claudius’s medicos) advertises a tooth-powder as favoured by the emperor’s sexually notorious wife Messalina – her moment of tooth.

Print and electronic texts/translations abound. Stick to the bi-lingual one by Barbara Flower and Elizabeth Rosenbaum (1958), and do not be deterred by the fact that, after sampling all the recipes, Ms Flower suddenly expired.

The book is divided into 10 chapters by kinds of food, setting the pace for modern arrangements. Internal references indicate that it was illustrated. The recipes list ingredients and instructions. Notably missing are cooking times. No watches, few houses had clocks (the one in Trimalchio’s dining-room in Petronius’s famous Banquet sequence, naively taken

as gospel by *Larousse Gastronomique* – the French don’t know everything – was a status symbol), and sundials aren’t much use for ‘im or ‘er indoors.

One discernible Roman taste is for the ersatz, evidenced by (e.g.) the recipe for ‘Patina of Anchovy without Anchovy’ – an editor once remarked to me that anything without anchovies was good. They also liked drenching everything, especially meat – to offset rancidity? – in rich sauces. Me, too, and Step Forward Paul McCartney and Jane Asher who reportedly (various websites) spent their first dinner date talking about gravy.

As we have such eponyms as Melba Toast and Peach Melba, so a number of dishes comport big names, notably Vitellius, Rome’s fattest emperor, thanks to his consumption of 100 oysters at a sitting, four dinners in one day, and other Mr Creosote-style indulgences. Another ephemeral ruler, Clodius Albinus (AD 196-197) was no slouch in the gourmandising department, consuming at one go 500 dried figs (Roman slang for hæmorrhoids), 100 peaches, 10 melons, 20 pounds of grapes, 400 oysters, 100 small birds. Certainly had the modernly recommended helpings of fruit, but one imagines he and Vitellius would have ‘maxed out’ on our junk foods – there was a kind of Roman pizza, somewhat thin and limited, old English style.

One wonders how often this Sweeney Todd-like experience happened: “When people unwittingly eat human flesh, served by unscrupulous restaurateurs and other such people, the similarity to pork is often noticed” – Galen, *On the Power of Foods*, ch3.

Offsetting these Græco-Roman dainties are the Huns who (Ammianus Marcellinus, bk31 ch2 para3) “put half-raw flesh between their thighs and the backs of their horses, and thus warmed it a little” – and so school dinners were born.

The Huns also wore clothes made from mouse-skins. One striking Apician recipe is for dormice stuffed with pork. Thus, via *Alice in Wonderland*, we reach this gem of wisdom from Jefferson Airplane’s ‘White Rabbit’: “Remember what the dormouse said – Feed Your Head”.

“In the old days people lived on acorns, but love affairs were all around” – Tibullus, *Poems*, bk2 no3 v69





## STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN and THEO PAIJMANS round up the weirdest news items from across Europe...

### DRESDEN MONSTER

Torsten Koj was strolling along the banks of the Elbe near the Carola Bridge in Dresden, Germany, in January 2018, when he got the shock of his life. A large head came out of the water, followed by a long, low hump and what might have been a tail. The 54-year-old man quickly snapped a photo. "It was several metres long," he explained, "and slowly swam downstream. This must be Nessie, I thought." However, the picture looks remarkably like a log, and Koj is a computer artist with an own website of photoshopped images. Dresden is also known to be a place visited by seals once or twice each decade, when they reach the city after swimming upstream from the North Sea. (TAG24.de, 15 Jan 2018)

### ON THE PROWL

Throughout late December 2017 and January 2018, wolves were seen, and in several cases confirmed, all over Germany. In December, tourists saw and photographed a wolf in the High Black Forest, a sighting later confirmed by the Office for the Environment. (SWR Aktuell, *Badische Zeitung*, 27 Dec; *Schwarzwälder Bote*, 28 Dec 2017) Other photos, taken on the banks of the Pleisse River, Saxony, were classed as possibly showing a wolf (*Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 3 Jan 2018), and another sighting was reported in the Allgäu, Bavaria, at the foothills of the Alps. (*Bayerischer Rundfunk*, 15 Jan 2018). Another wolf reported near Syke in Lower Saxony proved to have been a dog (*kreiszeitung.de*, 17 Jan 2018) This was followed by a confirmed wolf sighting near Stuttgart, one of the largest cities in Germany (*Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, SWR, 18 Jan 2018), and another in Sendenhorst, Münsterland. (*t-online.de*, 25 Jan 2018)



ABOVE: Ulrich Magin snapped this 'Log Ness Monster' in the Rhine; could the Elbe beast be a similar creature?

### REINDEER MASSACRE

More than 100 reindeer died in a massacre in Norway when they were killed over a few days in November 2017 by speeding freight trains. The owner of the free-ranging herds had contacted Norwegian railroads to ask for the trains to slow down, yet the warning was not relayed to the drivers. More than 250,000 reindeer range freely in Norway, and the herds were being led to their winter quarters when they collided and died, leading to what the radio station NRK called "a kilometres-long massacre." From 2013 to 2016, more than 2,000 reindeer have died from train collisions on the same stretch of railway. (*Die Rheinpfalz*, 28 Nov 2017)

### UFOS OVER BELGIUM...

Several UFOs were seen over West Flanders, Belgium, during the last week of February.

At about 7.30am on 23 February the occupants of a car, travelling to work in Wielsbeke from the village of Waregem, saw "a triangle with two bright lights like a star. Approaching

it, we saw it had red lights on the wings, and was shaped like a B2 stealth bomber, but the object was completely motionless". On the same day at around 6.50pm two people in Oudenaarde, East Flanders, saw "a hanging dot, lower than the airliners and their vapour trails. Then the dot ascended at an enormous speed". On the night of 23-24 February, at around 1am, an eyewitness stepped outside when it suddenly became light. "I thought a car had passed by, but there was no car." Looking up, he saw an orange fireball flying past, with little orange fragments falling off it in its wake. It did not explode and made no sound, but simply extinguished, the eyewitness declared. On 25 February, at around 6.45 in the morning, an eyewitness at the village of Lendele, West Flanders, happened to look out the window and saw a large bright globe without a tail shooting towards the ground but not striking the Earth. It lasted only a few seconds, after which the globe suddenly disappeared. The Belgian UFO

*Meldpunt* website concluded that in most cases meteors and aircraft had been seen, although it was not sure what might explain the quickly ascending dot, evaluating the sighting as having "too little data" to be resolved. (*ufomeldpunt.be/recent.html*, 4 Mar 2018)

### ...AND THE NETHERLANDS

Meanwhile, UFOs were also spotted over the Netherlands during the same period, according to entries at the Dutch UFO *Meldpunt* site. On 18 February in the town of Ede, Gelderland, at around 10 in the evening, eyewitness Daniëlle saw three points of light (one brighter than the others) in a triangular formation and moving in a north-westerly direction. According to Daniëlle, the object must have flown at a considerable height (a nearby aircraft provided a point of reference), and she remarked that if the three points of light were part of one object, it must have been "fairly large". Her sighting lasted two minutes.



Two days before in the city of Utrecht, at around 9.15 in the evening, an eyewitness saw three irregularly flashing lights flying in a north-westerly direction when one of the lights suddenly left formation and flew off in another direction. The lights flew slowly and no sound was heard. The sighting lasted six minutes.

On 23 February in the village of Biervliet, Zeeland, a man who had stepped outside for a smoke at around 10.40pm was looking at the stars when he spotted “three globes flying in a straight line”. They crept closer together and disappeared at the moment they seemed to join up. “I can’t believe what I saw”, the startled eyewitness said. A day later, a man from the city of Breda, Brabant, happened to look out the bedroom window at 1.15am when he saw “an enormous globe of white and turquoise light, as big as the full Moon but incredibly brilliant”. It was so bright that it hurt the witness’s eyes to look at it. The sighting lasted six seconds.

Further sightings were reported during the same period, with jumping lights in the town of Sibculo, Overijssel (26 Feb), two black discs with red lights flying together over Briele, Zuid-Holland (27 Feb), a cluster of orange-white lights at Heerlen, Limburg (27 Feb), and a semi-transparent globe seen passing over a highway

in the province of Noord-Holland at a height of 50ft (15m), before disappearing in a nearby pasture. ([www.ufomeldpunt.nl](http://www.ufomeldpunt.nl))

## GIANT HAIL

Peach-sized balls of hail with spikes of ice pelted villages on the shores of Lake Garda, Italy, on 11 and 28 August 2017. The Institute of Geophysics and Experimental Bioclimatology of Garda explained that the “spheroidal and elliptical formations of ice crystals” with a circumference of up to 6cm (2.4in) had formed at a height of 8,000m (26,200ft). (*Brescia Oggi*, 29 Aug 2017)

## AERIAL PHENOMENA

A 19th century house in the Hohenlohe Open-Air Museum at Wackershofen, Swabia, has recently gained a reputation for being haunted.

The house was originally built in 1856 in Morbach, near Stuttgart, and had been occupied on and off for nearly 150 years when it was donated to the museum by the wife of the last owner. She told Sibylle Frenz, of the museum’s technical staff, of a strange event she remembered from the 1950s. She and her husband had been asleep one night when the door of the bedroom stove suddenly sprung open and her husband found himself temporarily unable to move. The woman later learned that previous owners had reported similar

uncanny experiences. Other people sleeping in the house had suffered from the same sort of paralysis, while cows in the stable had frequent miscarriages.

Since the house has been transferred to the museum, visitors have reported strange sensations when visiting it. Once, a dog stood in front of the bedchamber with its hair standing on end and refused to move. Two women, sleeping in the house in the summer of 2017, heard footsteps, and doors opening on their own. Dowser Otto Eckstein found water under the house, but also darker energies, writing that the “tensions in this place could lead to severe physical and mental disorders in sensitive people”.

Michael Happe, head of the museum, said he had no explanation for the strange events and had himself found an electric cable in a non-public area had been severed on three different occasions. Whilst renovating the house, staff had also discovered a protective image of an angel on a wall. (*swp.de*, 31 Dec 2017)

## SWISS GHOST HUNTERS

The Swiss organisation Ghost Hunters Schweiz, founded by Thomas Frei, plans to hold a two-day seminar training ghost hunters on 12 May 2018 in Switzerland’s best known haunted house, the hotel Val Siniestra in the Engadine. The training is to

be comprehensive, including topics such as finding and exorcising spirits. “Beside some basic knowledge in First Aid and about disorders like sleep paralysis, we will teach participants how to use instruments to register spirit energy,” Frei explains. “We do not hunt ghosts, but evidence for their existence.” Then the future ghost hunters will learn how to communicate with the deceased. “Some spirits use tricks not to enter the afterlife but to stay here. So we will teach clearing techniques as well.” The hotel is deemed ideal for this purpose because of a resident spirit that has been encountered by staff as well as tourists. (*20min.ch*, 26 Jan 2018)

## ASSAILED BY UNDIES

In February, French media reported that garlands of underpants and womens’ panties had mysteriously appeared throughout the village of Poligny, a small town of 4,000 inhabitants, in the Jura. The strange affair had started on 5 February in the Grande Rue de Poligny, when a clothesline was found fastened between two trees and dotted with underwear. A few days later, five new lines, similarly hung with underwear, had appeared throughout the town. Theories range from a hoax to a political statement of some sort, but no one has claimed responsibility for the undies. (*france3-regions*, 16 Feb 2018)



ABOVE LEFT: Giant spiked hailstones fell on the shores of Lake Garda in 2017. ABOVE RIGHT: Switzerland’s famous haunted hotel will host seminars for ghost hunters.





## WHITER SHADES OF PALE

A white wallaby, a leucistic lion cub, a pigment-challenged peacock and more...



HIROLA CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

ABOVE: A pair of white giraffes flank a normally coloured specimen in Kenya's Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy. BELOW: The white lion cub of Altiplano Zoo in Mexico.

### LEUCISTIC GIRAFFES

Last year, a pair of rare white reticulated giraffes, a mother and child, were spotted in the Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy in Kenya's Garissa county, and caught on video. The area is managed by the Hirola Conservation Programme (HCP), an NGO dedicated to preserving the critically endangered hirola antelope, one of the rarest in the world. The HCP wrote in a blog post that a local villager first reported the giraffes to rangers in June 2017. "They were so close and extremely calm and seemed not disturbed by our presence. The mother kept pacing back and forth a few yards in front of us while signalling the baby giraffe to hide behind the bushes."

The giraffes suffer from a genetic condition called leucism, which inhibits pigmentation in the animal's skin cells. Unlike albinism, animals with leucism continue to produce dark

pigment in their soft tissue, which explains why they have dark eyes and other colouring. (Animals with albinism usually have red or pink eyes.) Leucism occurs across the animal kingdom: birds, lions, fish, peacocks, penguins, eagles, hippos, moose and snakes have all displayed the trait.

According to the HCP, this most recent footage is only the third known sighting of a white giraffe. One was reported in the same Ishaqbini conservancy in March 2016, while in Tanzania, a white Masai giraffe calf called Omo was observed in Tarangire national park in January 2016. Reticulated giraffes are listed as 'vulnerable', with an estimated 8,500 individuals living in the wild in Somalia, southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya.

Besides having pale skin because of leucism or albinism, animals can have a third condition, called isabellinism, that leaves them looking

*This footage is only the third known sighting of a white giraffe*



greyish-yellow or the colour of parchment. A dubious legend has it that this colour is named after the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia of Spain, who supposedly vowed not to remove or wash her shift until her husband, Archduke Albert of Austria, had conquered Ostend. Since the siege of the city lasted over three years (July 1601–Sept 1604), it is claimed that the discoloration of her shift led to the naming of the colour. As, however, 'isabella' (the English name of a colour) awkwardly predates the siege, a variation of the legend refers to Isabella I of Castile and the eight-month siege of Granada by Ferdinand II of Aragon, starting in April 1491. *NY Times (int. edition), Guardian, 15 Sept 2017.*

### PRIDE OF THE ZOO

A four-month-old white lion is the pride of Altiplano Zoo in Mexico, and was shown to the public on 19 January. White lions





ABOVE: The elusive white bull moose photographed by Hans Nilsson in Varmland, Sweden. ABOVE RIGHT: A leucistic squirrel.

are critically endangered and there are believed to be fewer than 300 in the world. They are endemic to just one location – the Greater Timbavati region in South Africa – which is full of pale sandy riverbeds and light-coloured long grass, ideal for camouflage. In 2004, we reported on four white lions in a safari park in Bewdley, Worcestershire [FT185:14]. (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 20 Jan 2018.

### STAG DO

On 7 January 2018, a rare white stag, a member of the red deer species, was seen roaming the Cairngorms National Park in the Scottish Highlands, in a herd of about 200 red deer. The witnesses were a group of men on Damien

Zoyo's stag do, including Marc Brunelle, who took photos. This is probably the first time such an animal has been spotted in the wild in recent years. "It's definitely a white red stag," said Charles Smith-Jones of the British Deer Society. "This is very unusual. In some cultures [for instance the ancient Celts] they are seen as messengers of the gods so they're left well alone." Such an animal is said to bring good luck to those who see it – although it has also been called the 'Judas deer' because its bright colour gives the herd away to hunters. The white appearance is usually caused by leucism, while a small number of deer are albinos. The stag party hoped the sighting was a good omen for

Mr Zoyo's wedding to Caroline Aulen. *D.Mail*, 29 Jan; *Metro*, 30 Jan 2018. For a white stag in the Highlands in 2008, see FT236:25.

### ELUSIVE MOOSE

For the last three years, local Swedish politician Hans Nilsson had often attempted to film a white bull moose in Varmland, Sweden. In August 2017 he finally caught stunning footage of the moose crossing a shallow river and walking through tall grass. Though not albino, it appears to be entirely white, with soft white velvet coating even its antlers. In late June, two white moose twins were captured on camera in Norway. The footage wasn't clear enough to determine whether they were albino or

piebald (white with specks of brown). Some speculate that the number of these ghostly animals in Scandinavia is increasing. *National Geographic*, 14 Aug; <i>15 Aug; Daily Astorian (Astoria, Oregon), 18 Aug 2017.

### WHITE RED

A red squirrel with leucism, making it white, was a regular visitor to Craigatin House in Pitlochry, Perthshire, last summer and through to November. White squirrels were photographed in Grimoldby, Lincolnshire, in October, and in Burgess Hill, West Sussex, in November. Simon Pimblett photographed another one raiding a bird feeder in his back garden in Dulwich, south-east



LEFT: The rare white red stag, standing out from his more conventionally coloured herd members, photographed in the Cairngorms by Damien Zoyo.





# STRANGE DAYS



COURTESY BOSF



HILARY CHAMBERS / CATERS NEWS



SWNS.COM

ABOVE: Five-year-old Alba, the world's only known albino orangutan, could get his very own island. TOP RIGHT: The 'ino' little owl captured on film by Hilary Chambers. ABOVE RIGHT: Bertie, the 'ghost peacock' that terrorised a village, struts his stuff outside a house in Handcross, West Sussex.

London, on 10 February 2018. He had first seen the shy creature several weeks earlier. *Louth Leader*, 11 Oct; *Dundee Courier & Advertiser*, 2 Nov; *Mid-Sussex Gazette*, 24 Nov; *D.Express*, 3 Nov 2017, 13 Feb 2018; *D.Mail*, 13 Feb 2018.

## GHOST PEACOCK

With an impressive display of pure white feathers, an albino "ghost peacock" was wandering around the West Sussex village of Handcross last June, screeching like a banshee in the small hours, prowling across rooftops and standing in the middle of the road. Locals named him Bertie and called on Derek Lamm, owner of Summers Poultry Rescue Centre, to take him away. Bertie was re-homed in Kent. His provenance was unknown. *D.Mail*, 13 June 2017.

## ALBA'S ISLAND

The Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation wants to create a 12-acre "forest island" for

the world's only known albino orangutan. The five-year-old ape, named Alba after being rescued from captivity in a Central Kalimantan village in 2016, cannot be safely returned to the wild because of health issues related to her albinism, including poor sight and hearing and the chances of developing skin cancer. *<i>*, *D.Telegraph*, 21 Sept 2017.

## PALE SPARROWS

Birdwatcher Clare Kendall, who lives on a houseboat on the Kennet and Avon Canal in Wiltshire, saw a pair of leucistic sparrows last May. "At first I thought I hadn't woken up properly," she said, "but now I see them every day. They bathe with their brothers and sisters, who have brown feathers." A single white sparrow was spotted in Cornwall in 2010, and others in Norfolk and Melbourne (Australia) in 2015. Then last July, an albino sparrow was photographed in Dunning,

Perthshire, with telltale pink eyes. *D.Mail*, 30 May; *Dundee Courier & Advertiser*, 12 July; *D.Express*, 13 July 2017.

## WHITE WALLABY?

An albino wallaby was filmed hopping down a country lane in East Anglia last September. Julian Eley spotted it at night on the Essex/Suffolk border, between Liston and Glemsford. "It certainly looks like a wallaby," said a spokesperson for the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. "It has probably escaped from a wildlife park. It would be unlikely to survive long in the wild." *BBC News*, 25 Sept 2017.

## INO OWL

A pure white little owl was photographed by Hilary Chambers in County Durham last September, perched next to an owl of normal coloration. She thought it was a leucistic or albino owl, but Hein Von Grouw of the Natural History Museum examined her photos

and concluded that it was an 'ino' rather than an albino bird, explaining in an email that "the bird is clearly not a juvenile; so in other words, this bird is independent and able to source its own food, it must be an ino rather than an albino. Albino birds have a very poor eyesight due to the total lack of melanin pigment in their eyes. In inos there is still a little bit of melanin left, in both the eyes and the plumage. In the plumage this pale coloured melanin rapidly bleaches further in the sunlight and soon the bird appears to be fully white. The remaining melanin in the eyes, however, is enough to keep proper eyesight and therefore ino birds do not have a problem with their vision and often survive very well for a long time." *D.Express*, 15 Sept, *D.Mail*, 19 Oct 2017.

For a white buffalo, see **FT138:18**. For other round-ups of white animals, see **FT180:6**, 226:6-7, 259:6.



**KARL SHUKER** greets a newly discovered arboreal crab and pockets some crypto-currency...



**ABOVE LEFT:** The forest near the tribal settlement at Agathyamala Biological Park, Kottoor Reserve Forest, Kottoor, Kerala, where specimens of the arboreal crab were found. **ABOVE CENTRE:** Water collects in the forks and hollows of the trees. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The new crab, *Kani maranjandum*.

APPUKUTTANNAIR BIJU KUMAR, SMRITHY RAJ, PETER KLING

### CRYPTO TREE CRABS

Many very notable cryptozoological discoveries have been made by researchers taking heed of reports from local people regarding strange creatures not known to science but seemingly well known to them (i.e. ethnoknown), rather than simply dismissing their accounts as baseless folklore. And so it was once again, when a team of crustacean specialists conducting a very extensive survey of freshwater crabs in southern India's Western Ghats that began in 2014, were told by the local Kani tribe about an extremely shy, elusive form of long-legged crab with a distinctive dark purple shell that spent its entire life high above their heads in trees and in the canopy. For although several species of Indian crab are known to climb trees, none was known to science at that time in India – or indeed anywhere else in the world – that never ventured down from the trees, having become exclusively arboreal. All crabs need water for reproduction purposes, and according to the Kani, this rarely seen arboreal crab obtained all the water that it needs from rain that collected within the hollows of large trees.

Although the team took notice of the Kani people's testimony, confirming it with tangible evidence proved far more difficult. Finally, however, on 5 September 2016 a specimen was captured, an adult female, followed later by a large adult male, and everything that the Kani had said about this crab was verified. Following a comprehensive study of these and other specimens obtained, the Kani's remarkable tree crab was revealed to be not only a species new to science but also one so different from all others that it required the creation of an entirely new genus. It has now been formally dubbed

*Kani maranjandum*, thereby honouring the people who brought about its zoological discovery and recognition, and as the world's first-known totally arboreal crab species it is both a most extraordinary and a highly unexpected addition to the world's official crustacean catalogue. [academic.oup.com/jcb/article/37/2/157/3097389](http://academic.oup.com/jcb/article/37/2/157/3097389); [phys.org/news/2017-04-species-tree-crab-western-ghats.html](http://phys.org/news/2017-04-species-tree-crab-western-ghats.html).

### MICHAEL WALTERS (1942-2017)

Once again, cryptozoology is diminished by the loss of a major longstanding supporter from mainstream science. Douglas GD Russell, the Senior Curator of Eggs at the Natural History Museum in London, has informed me that his predecessor, Michael Walters, passed away on 22 October 2017. In addition to his many years of mainstream ornithological research and his numerous publications – including such classics as *Extinct Birds* (co-authored with Julian P Hume) and *The Complete Birds of the World*, both of which I greatly treasure – Michael had always been very interested in cryptozoology, and he was a member of the Editorial Board for the International Society of Cryptozoology's interdisciplinary scientific journal *Cryptozoology* for its last three volumes (11-13).

We corresponded down through the years regarding various mystery birds, some of which he included in his *Complete Birds of the World* – an extremely comprehensive annotated checklist in book format of every modern-day bird species then known, as well as various controversial examples, such as the jetete, a still-contentious, officially unrecognised flamingo form reported from South America. I am currently in the early stages of a major research and writing project that I know would have interested

him immensely, and we would certainly have been in communication on many occasions in relation to it in the future as it expands and matures, so I am extremely sad that he will never see it. As ever, here at *FT* our most sincere condolences and deepest sympathies are offered to Michael's family and also to his many friends and colleagues worldwide. Douglas GD Russell, pers. comms, 7 Feb 2018.

### NESSIE COINING IT IN

At the beginning of March 2018, Britain's Royal Mint announced that it would shortly be issuing into general circulation a new series of 10p coins with 26 different designs, each one representing a different letter of the alphabet. To the delight of cryptozoologists everywhere, moreover, the letter 'L' would be represented by the Loch Ness monster. The design features the familiar long-necked, multi-humped Nessie beloved of souvenir sellers and newspaper cartoonists, even though it falls somewhere midway between the traditional plesiosaur image and a more anguilline version, both of which have been reported by various eyewitnesses. A total of 2.6 million of these new 10p coins have now been issued, i.e. 100,000 coins for each of the 26 designs. At the time of writing, I have yet to find a Nessie 10p in my change, but I shall keep on looking. For those collectors seeking a mint, uncirculated example, however, all 26 designs can be purchased from any British bank for the sum of £2 each – or from Internet auction sites for considerably more! [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-43242136](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-43242136), 1 Mar 2018.

ROYAL MINT







## MEDICAL BAG

More medical marvels and misadventures, including vampire therapy, Indonesia's egg-laying boy, and the dire results of eating slugs for a dare...

- Akmal, 14, from Gowa in Indonesia, says he has been laying eggs, and had squeezed out 20 from his rectum in the past two years. His father Rusli said: "I cracked the first egg and its content was all yellow, no white. A month later I cracked another one, and its content was all white and no yellow." Akmal has been X-rayed, with his family claiming this is proof he is telling the truth. He has been repeatedly hospitalised for his condition, and recently laid two eggs in front of doctors, who are naturally said to be "baffled". A spokesperson from the hospital said: "Our suspicion is that the eggs were deliberately shoved into Akmal's rectum. But we did not see it directly." Rusli denied this. *D.Mail online, 22 Feb; thaivisa.com, 26 Feb 2018.*



LEFT: You must be yolking! 14-year-old Akmal and one of his eggs. BELOW: Santlal Pal and his giant brain tumour.

- Santlal Pal, a 31-year-old shopkeeper, had been carrying around a brain tumour weighing 1.87kg (4lb 2oz) before surgery in Mumbai on 14 February. The tumour was so large that he appeared to have two heads mounted one on top of the other. "After the patient regained consciousness, we researched and concluded this was the world's heaviest [brain] tumour to be reported so far," said the hospital's head of neurosurgery, Trimurti Nadkarni. "It was a rare operation and the patient has survived. Before the surgery, he had minimal vision, which may improve now." At the time of the report, Mr Pal was walking and eating normally. The previous heaviest tumour to be successfully excised from a patient who survived the procedure weighed 1.4kg (3lb). *[AFP] 22 Feb 2018.*



paying bills or preparing meals.

Dr Sharon Sha, associate professor of neurology at Stanford University, who was the trial's clinical lead, said she was not expecting such early positive results. She said: "Our enthusiasm concerning these findings needs to be tempered by the fact that this was a small trial; but these results warrant further study." Many cultures have extolled the properties of youthful blood, with the blood of young warriors drunk by the victors. Scientists believe that young blood is so potent because it carries large quantities of a protein known as GDF11, which diminishes as we age. *D.Telegraph, 5 Nov 2017.*

- A small electric charge to a specific nerve in a woman's ankle can help increase her sex drive. The nerve runs from the soles of the feet to the base of the spine, but is most easily accessed at the ankle. It can be zapped with a tiny needle, which then boosts blood supply – apparently acting like a female version of Viagra. Researchers at the University of Michigan are giving volunteer women a three-month course of weekly treatments lasting half an hour. The aim is to help women who suffer with sexual dysfunction. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 23 Feb 2018.*

- A 23-year-old woman was arrested in Spain after throwing pumpkin seeds in her former lover's face, knowing he was allergic. She is said to have waited for him at the market where he worked in Castellon before shouting "Take that, you son of a bitch!" She faced a charge of wounding while the man, 24, went to a health centre for an injection to stop his throat swelling and his body going into shock. "Luckily I didn't have my mouth open," he said. *Eve. Standard, 30 Nov; Metro, 1 Dec 2017.*

- A new trial has found that pumping the blood of young people into the elderly may help ward off the symptoms of dementia. Scientists tried out the so-called "vampire therapy" after astonishing results three years ago showed that infusions of young blood into older mice formed new blood vessels and improved memory and learning.

For the new trial, 18 people over 65 with mild to moderate Alzheimer's were given either four weekly infusions of plasma from people aged between 18 and 30, or a placebo. Although the phase one tests were only

designed to prove that the procedure was safe, participants reported a marked improvement in Alzheimer's symptoms. Patients found it easier to carry out daily tasks such as remembering to take medicine,



ABOVE: The tiny, translucent worm retrieved from Abby Beckley's eye.

- Abby Beckley had been working on a salmon fishing boat in Alaska when her left eye became irritated and she began suffering from a migraine. After five days she returned to port where she used a mirror to examine her eye. Instead of an errant eyelash she pulled out a tiny, translucent worm. Scientists later revealed she had become the first person in the world to suffer an eye infestation of a worm species previously seen only in cattle. It is spread by flies that feed on eyeball lubrication. Scientists at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said 14 translucent parasitic worms of the species *Thelazia gulosa*, all less than half an inch (1.27cm) long, were extracted from the 26-year-old's eye over a 20-day period, before her symptoms dissipated. The case was written up in the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. *D.Telegraph*, 14 Feb 2018.

- Sam Ballard, 19, swallowed a garden slug for a drunken dare at a party in Sydney, Australia, nine years ago. Unfortunately, the creature infected him with a parasitic lungworm. This caused a brain infection that left him quadriplegic. Ballard, now 28, requires 24-hour care. *Sun*, 7 Mar 2018.

- An army veteran believed to be Britain's longest-staying patient died last May after 54 years at West Moffat Hospital, Lanarkshire. James Morris entered hospital with a broken leg in 1962 at the age of 21, but never went home after

suffering a cardiac arrest on the operating table, which left him in a vegetative state. "Over the years we found a way to communicate with him," said his brother Philip Morris, 62. "He was all there mentally but couldn't communicate with us at all. He only ever learnt how to say three words again – his three loves – 'home', 'pub', and 'horses'." *Metro*, 2 May 2017.

- Sisters Laura Knight, 38, and Philippa Hewitt, 31, both gave birth to daughters on the same day in West Suffolk Hospital last November. Philippa gave birth to Emily, and five hours later Laura gave birth to Verity. Then in February, a brother and sister became parents for the first time on the same day in the same hospital. Frank Jones's wife Lauren had daughter Reeva at Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow, Essex. In the next room, Frank's sister Sophie gave birth to Evie by Caesarean section, 11 days late. *D.Express*, 22 Nov 2017; *Sunday People*, 18 Feb 2018.

- Sixty residents (including 16 children) of a village in South Africa were recovering in hospital after eating meat from a cow killed by a venomous cobra. The victims, from Mpoza near Tsolo on the Eastern Cape, reported symptoms including diarrhoea, vomiting, headaches and severe stomach cramps. "We urge people not to eat carcasses they find in fields, on roads – wherever," said a Department of Health spokesman. (*Adelaide*) *Sunday Mail*, 4 Feb 2018.

## 223: 20/20 VISION



### The myth

If the optician tells you you've got 20/20 vision, she's saying your eyesight is perfect, faultless, as good as it gets. 20/20 is the best.

### The "truth"

First, a word on terminology. The Snellen Fraction (named for its inventor, Dutch ophthalmologist Herman Snellen, 1834-1908) measures visual acuity – essentially, the sharpness of your static eyesight. In countries that use feet and inches, the first number of the fraction signifies 20ft; in the UK, and other officially metric countries, it's 6 (for six metres), so 20/20 becomes 6/6. Either way, it represents the distance between the patient and the eye chart. The second number is the distance at which a person with normal eyesight can read the chart. If your test shows you are 20/20, it means you can see from 20ft (6m) away what the average person can see from 20ft away. In other words, 20/20 vision means "average vision". If you (and your eyes) are young and healthy, you should be seeing, at worst, 20/15 – that is, you can see from 20ft what the average person can only see from 15ft (4.6m). If you score 20/30, it means your visual acuity is worse than average. The aim of a standard spectacle prescription is to bring your visual acuity up to 20/20 – hence, presumably, the confusion between 20/20 and perfection. The great majority of the population are 20/20, or 6/6, provided their lens prescription, if any, is up to date.

### Sources

[www.allaboutvision.com/eye-exam/2020-vision.htm](http://www.allaboutvision.com/eye-exam/2020-vision.htm); [www.aaopt.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/what-does-20-20-vision-mean](http://www.aaopt.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/what-does-20-20-vision-mean); [www.aaopt.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/](http://www.aaopt.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/)

### Disclaimer

If your eagle eyes spot any errors in this column, please wave them in front of our noses on the letters page.

### Mythchaser

A reader who was brought up to believe that houseplants are "good for you", because they increase the amount of oxygen in the room, is having doubts. Can there really be a measurable overall difference in oxygen levels between the green and the greenless bedroom?





## NECROLOG

This month, we celebrate the legacy of a pioneer of psychosocial ufology and turn the final page in the life of one of Britain's maverick publishers



### PETER ROGERSON

In 1961 a 10-year-old Peter Rogerson was having his hair cut at the local barber's in Urmston, his hometown just outside Manchester. In the corner of the shop there was one of those old-style wire paperback spinners. One book in particular caught his eye: Aimé Michel's *The Truth About Flying Saucers* (Corgi 1958). The words 'FLYING SAUCERS' stood out in big, bold capital letters. After his haircut he rushed home, got half a crown (12½p) and hurried back to the shop to buy what he described as "not just my actual first UFO book, but my actual first real grown-up book." He added: "If any book set my life on its course, this is it."

Caught up in the excitement of the UFO flaps in the 1960s, he joined the Manchester-based UFO group DIGAP. Listening to some of the naïve views expounded, and through his deeper reading, he realised that the so-called 'extraterrestrial hypothesis' (ETH) was incapable of answering the ever-more complex questions that the topic raised. He realised that the UFO experience was intimately linked to a whole range of other anomalous experiences, and the 'nuts and bolts' explanation for the phenomenon blocked any

attempt to gain a broader understanding. Writers such as John Keel and Jacques Vallee were also starting to think in this direction.

In the late 1960s my colleague John Harney and I were publishing the *Merseyside UFO Bulletin*, a typical 'zine of the time, turned out on a hand-cranked stencil duplicator. We had become rather unpopular with some of the old-school ufologists because of our critical attitude, but when Peter found a copy of the *Bulletin* in a box of magazines at a DIGAP meeting it chimed with his own views. He wrote a 'Letter to the Editor' that exploded with ideas, placing UFOs firmly in the fortean field, and signalling the start of what became known as the 'New Ufology'. From then on he was a regular contributor to the *Bulletin* and its successor incarnations through more than four decades, providing a series of thoughtful and thought-provoking articles and incisive book reviews, as well as compiling the massive INTCAT listing of entity reports.

Peter spent his working life as a librarian, with a special interest in local history. He was the local history librarian for Warrington libraries, and this contact with the past enabled him to see that the events described by UFO experiencers were paralleled by the stories told for centuries about contacts with unknown and otherworldly entities. This extended to ghosts and hauntings; he commented once that in his work at the library a large proportion of people who enquired about the history of their houses were searching to see who had died in the house and was subsequently haunting it!

Along with his *Magonia* colleagues, particularly Roger Sandell [obituary FT87:14],

and through correspondence with French ufologists like Michel Monnerie and Thierry Pinvidic, he was instrumental in developing the idea of 'psychosocial ufology'. The Psychosocial Hypothesis (PSH) secularised some of the occult-influenced ideas that had begun to circulate amongst ufologists unsatisfied with the ETH. It suggested that known psychological processes such as hypnopompic and hypnagogic imagery, distortions of perception and the unreliability of memory in many circumstances, could be influenced by factors such as popular culture, mass media, social conditioning, folklore, historical precedents, myth and legend, to explain many of the stranger aspects of the UFO mystery, without recourse to occult or psychic phenomena.

Besides his work in helping transform British ufology, he studied folklore, particularly Lancashire tales and legends; working-class and radical history and politics; and electoral systems around the world. As the chief book reviewer for *Magonia*, he accumulated a massive collection of books on ufology, psychic research, paranormal phenomena and other fortean topics – perhaps, after Hilary Evans's, the largest such collection in the UK. On top of this were his collections of political and historical titles. His home in Urmston, where he lived his entire life, resembled the classical fortean image of a book-filled house with barely room between the stacks to move about!

Fortunately, Peter had made preparations for the distribution of this unique collection, and a great deal of it has already been transferred under the supervision of Clas Svahn to the Archive for the Unexplained (AFU) in

Norrköping, Sweden, where it will always be available for scholars and students. It is a shame that no suitable resting-place could be found in Britain. His main legacy, however, will be his writings; erudite, scholarly, often controversial, sometimes even angry, but always leading to a deeper and broader understanding.

Most of his articles are preserved in the *Magonia* online archives: [http://mufobmagazine.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/Rogerson\\_Peter](http://mufobmagazine.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/Rogerson_Peter) and [http://intcat.blogspot.co.uk/Peter\\_Rogerson](http://intcat.blogspot.co.uk/Peter_Rogerson), librarian, archivist, ufologist, book collector, born Urmston, Lancashire 1 July 1951; died Manchester 6 Mar 2018, aged 67.

John Rimmer

### ERNEST HECHT

Hecht came to Britain as a nine-year-old refugee in the *Kindertransport* from Czechoslovakia. After graduation from Hull University, in 1951 he set up Souvenir Press in his parents' back bedroom, with a loan of £250. He was described by *The Bookseller* as "one of a number of émigrés who changed the face of British publishing after the Second World War alongside George Weidenfeld, Paul Hamlyn and André

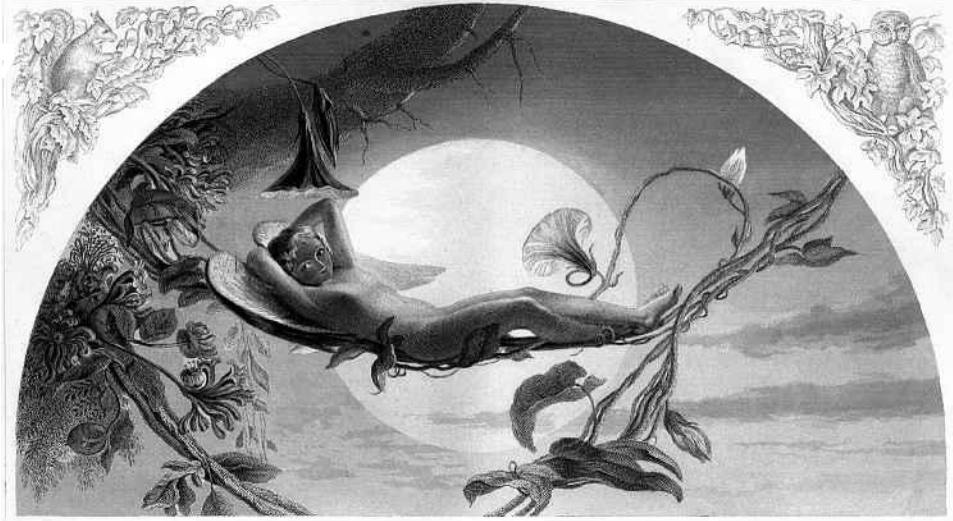




Deutsch.” Unlike many of his rivals, his imprint managed to avoid being swallowed by one of the larger media empires and by the time of his death his was the sole remaining independently owned major publishing house in the country.

He had only one editor and no marketing department at all. He ran his company from ramshackle premises opposite the British Museum. Visitors would find him in the front room peering out from between piles of books, notes, old gramophone records, Arsenal T-shirts, wine bottles, theatre programmes, plastic bags and, possibly, unsolicited manuscripts, which swamped his desk and spilt on to the floor. “I find things by the dust, like arboreal dating,” he claimed. His catalogue was as unorthodox as the man, ranging from jazz to euthanasia, Borges to Arthur Hailey, Che Guevara to PG Wodehouse, and included quite a few quasi-fortean classics such as *Chariots of the Gods* (Erich von Däniken), *The Bermuda Triangle* (Charles Berlitz), *The Hynek UFO Report* (Dr J Allen Hynek), *Coming Back Alive* (Joe Fisher) and *Communion* (Whitley Strieber).

Hecht was once reported to be battling with Camden Council over the right to fly his company flag at half-mast whenever a title was remaindered. He produced plays and concerts, and in 2003 set up the Ernest Hecht Charitable Foundation, which supports a wide variety of good causes including Singing for the Brain (for Alzheimer’s sufferers), the Tricycle Theatre and the Chickenshed Theatre Company. He was awarded the OBE in 2015, and was indifferent to what would happen to his business after his death “for the simple reason that I won’t be here.” *Ernest Hecht OBE, publisher, born Moravia 21 Sept 1929; died London 13 Feb 2018, aged 88.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### THE BLACKBURN DOCTORS

Just imagine that a secret sect of sorcerers was hiding in a British town in the late 19th century. They were identified by a special Christian name and were believed by family and neighbours to have supernatural powers. If I’d read this a week ago I would have rolled my eyes and closed the offending browser. But I’ve since come to believe that something along these lines actually happened in the last place I would have imagined.

Now ignore all thoughts of hellish villages in the fens or secretive corners of the Cotswolds. The brotherhood in question was based in and around a mill town in Lancashire: Blackburn. In Victorian and Edwardian Lancashire there was a custom that seventh sons were called, not John, James or Henry but ‘Doctor’, as they were believed to have special healing powers. This does not appear in any occult or folklore book known to me: after much struggle I’ve found just half a dozen obscure references, most in yellowing newspapers. More importantly, using censuses and baptismal records, I’ve tracked the Doctors themselves. Almost 400 children were baptised ‘Doctor’ in Lancashire in the later 1700s, the 1800s and the early 1900s: the last Doctor I’ve come across was brought to the font in 1926. Meanwhile, the English censuses (1841-1911) confirm that, at any one time, between a 100 and 250 Doctors were walking

about in the country; the vast majority were from the Hundred of Blackburn, with, curiously, a small pocket in the Huddersfield area.

I was initially sceptical that these were seventh sons – I mean, come on! But going through the parish and census records most Doctors turn out to be just that. They are sometimes pure seventh sons (with no girls intervening) and sometimes intermittent, with the odd sister sprinkled down the line of succession; but almost invariably, each is the seventh male in the family. In several cases I was able to trace their fathers, although, unfortunately, I found not a single case of a seventh son of a seventh son. Blackburn, by the way, had appalling infant mortality in the 1800s and a correspondingly high birth rate: the average working-class family there had about six children. Families with seven sons were not, then, as rare as they might be today. There is ample evidence,

meanwhile, that, well into the 1900s, mystics advertised themselves as seventh sons: something that evidently got the punters in. And did these Blackburn Doctors have magical powers? I can only report that one, a Doctor Greenwood, became a legendary Blackburn Rovers player in the later 1800s and appeared in 1882 for England in a 13-0 massacre of Ireland...

**Simon Young’s new book, *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* (Gibson Square), is out now.**

THERE WAS A  
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# Sad news, bad news, and dodgy videos

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

NATION	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	TOTALS
BELGIUM	171	227	317	237	254	448	1654
DENMARK	107	128	152	174	256	312	1129
FINLAND	107	119	188	175	214	201	1004
FRANCE	179	177	315	604	570	472	2317
GERMANY	198	396	452	643	238	454	2381
ITALY	223	254	305	532	840	1189	3343
NORWAY	30	42	31	51	52	68	274
SWEDEN	191	214	176	169	161	188	1099
TOTALS	1206	1557	1936	2585	2585	3332	13201



ABOVE LEFT: The number of UFO reports across Europe are in steady decline – but why? ABOVE RIGHT: A frame from the new TTSA video, GO FAST.

## SAD NEWS

First, the sad news. Peter Rogerson, one of the founding contributors to *Magonia*, passed away from cancer of the throat on 6 March, at what's these days the fairly tender age of 67. You can read an obituary by his editor and great friend John Rimmer on p26, and find John's tribute to Peter on the *Magonia* blog at <http://pelicanist.blogspot.co.uk/2018/03/remembering-peter.html>.

I met Peter only twice, once at an FT UnCon, once at a ufological gathering in Southport in 1998. From those meetings I formed the impression that he was not altogether comfortable in company, but I already knew he gave good phone. When I was writing books, we had many conversations, which always started with him being shy and cautious, but ere long he would go *twang* inside and we would end up both being mildly hysterical from semi-surreal joking. So he wasn't actually unsociable, but perhaps he was just happiest reading – as evidenced by his prodigious, 8,000-volume library on *fortean* – and writing, as evidenced by his seemingly endless flow of articles and book reviews for *Magonia*. All show originality of thought emerging from an almost addictively enquiring mind. And so, he became one of the founders of psychosocial ufology in this country, and he was a proper scholar with it. His ground-breaking *Notes Towards a Revisionist History of Abductions* (for example) showed just how deep was the soil in which the Betty and Barney Hill case (and all that followed) was rooted and was impeccably documented. His style was never dry, although he had a positively dessicated sense of humour, which kept one alert to nuance.

Only a handful of people has illuminated

ufology the way Peter Rogerson did. With his death, a light has truly gone out.

## BAD NEWS

The bad news might be good news, but bad rhymes with sad, and in any case no explanation springs immediately to mind. Across Europe, according to data collected by the inestimable and apparently indefatigable Eduardo Russo of Centro Italiano Studi Ufologici, the number of reports of UFOs has been dropping steadily for some years. These are raw data, so at the moment the numbers don't distinguish between what may turn out to be identifiable objects and those that may remain apparently inexplicable. There are some interesting blips, up and down, in some countries and over the years. But the overall trend is unmistakably downward. Is this because people are more sophisticated about what they see in the sky, and these days can tell a Chinese lantern from a spaceship? Or is it that people see weird stuff and can't be bothered to report it? Or something else?

## ARE-WE-BEING-HAD? NEWS

Or non-news, or fake news, or something. The 'To The Stars Academy' saga (see **FT363:28**) continues, with claim and counter-claim, lots of missing information, and curious discoveries about the DeLonge money trail. Hard to know where to start, but let's begin with the US Department of Defense saying unequivocally that it did *not* release the (now three) videos that TTSA is claiming are official DoD releases with chain-of-custody documentation in each case. No one outside TTSA has seen this documentation. Ho hum. And then there's the third video, titled GO FAST – like previous

releases filmed by an ATFLIR pod aboard a US Navy F/A-18A Super Hornet jet, above the ocean.

TTSA coyly say it was filmed off the east coast of the USA in 2015, like the GIMBAL video from the skies off Florida. Actually, there's a rather powerful suspicion that it was recorded about 20 minutes after the GIMBAL video, since the display shows the same (unique) mission code and the excited voices of the pilot and weapons system operator on the two soundtracks sound identical. This time a small white dot is tracked. Sundry calculations (aided by reasonable assumptions) posted for all to see (on [www.metabunk.org/go-fast-footage-from-tom-delonges-to-the-stars-academy-bird-balloon.t9569/](http://www.metabunk.org/go-fast-footage-from-tom-delonges-to-the-stars-academy-bird-balloon.t9569/)) suggest that the object was about 13,500ft (4,100m) above the ocean and travelling rather more slowly, as in somewhere around 50 knots, than the 370-odd knots suggested by TTSA. And it's between six and 10ft (1.8-3m) across. Which suggests it's a large pelagic bird, or a balloon. And the exclamations from the crewmen suggest they're delighted at having got a 'lock' on it, which in turn suggests this is a record of a training mission (as first suggested here). There are also interesting comments on the UFO UpDates Facebook page. Meanwhile, Robert Sheaffer took the opportunity to do a bit of gumshoeing around the Byzantine corporate structure of Tom DeLonge's enterprise. I won't spoil his fun by giving away all his sleuthing discovered, but recommend you visit his blog ([badufos.blogspot.co.uk/2018/03/to-stars-releases-another-video-and.html](http://badufos.blogspot.co.uk/2018/03/to-stars-releases-another-video-and.html)) instead. Does one smell fish? Personally, I should just love it if the GO FAST video turned out to show a multi-million dollar war machine chasing... *a pelican*.



## Wilde ideas

JENNY RANGLES finds that a 1980s pop star's return to recording was inspired by a close encounter

Pop Singer Kim Wilde is most famous for her early 1980s hit 'Kids in America' and enjoyed a string of chart singles over the next decade. Eventually, though, she lost her recording contract, focused on raising a family and, as a musician, all but vanished. In 2012 she briefly resurfaced when an impromptu karaoke session on a train going home from a Christmas party was filmed by fellow passengers and went viral, but she has now returned to the record and touring stage in a curious way.

At the launch for her new album, *Here Come The Aliens*, Kim said that it, and her subsequent tour, was inspired by a close encounter when observed from "above". She also admits to having long been "fascinated by space" and says her most vivid childhood memory was watching the Moon landing, aged nine.

But the encounter that triggered her musical resurgence can be dated to 26 June 2009 because of two things: it was the day after singer Michael Jackson died, which would focus the mind of any pop star, and Kim had spent hours in the local hospital near Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, with her son, who had a high fever and suspected swine flu. Happily, this fear proved unfounded and he was released when his temperature went down.

Kim was relaxing late that night in the garden with her husband and a friend when, at around 11 o'clock, "it happened" and they saw some "incredible lights in the sky". Talking on *Loose Women* on 12 March 2018, she admitted that it sounded "crazy", but insisted that the sighting had "changed my life" because you can never be the same "when you see something unexplained".

She has since described "orbs" that were initially motionless and "very bright", at one point "behind clouds" but shining through them. She likened them to the Moon in colour and size. Kim and her two companions walked down the lawn to get a closer look, watching the lights move soundlessly to and fro and then 'shoot off'. Sadly, she did not report the sighting, especially after being asked if "wine was involved". But others saw the same thing that night.

Diane Prior photographed the incident when her 40-year-old husband called her into the garden at around 10.45, at about the same time as Kim's sighting. The Priors contacted the *Daily Telegraph*, which



published the photo on 1 July 2009. It basically showed a garden wall and above it a small, tennis ball-like object in the sky; it is fuzzy, whilst the wall is sharp, but this will be the camera focus setting. There were actually two of these balls, just as Kim reported, but on the photo only one can be made out. The couple told the paper that the lights were "above the clouds, swinging left to right", which is also consistent with what the singer reported. They added that they had "never seen anything like it before".

Locally, the argument surfaced that these sightings might have been caused by a laser light show, which often occurs in connection with Summer festivals. The way in which the balls move from side to side and appear to be shining through cloud is consistent with that idea, but the photo does not really support it, and there is no trace of a beam carrying the light onto the cloud. However, I have seen laser displays from miles away, when you can only see the beam on the cloud and the 'circle' of another that darts around, but not the upward-pointing beam, so the idea can't be ruled out.

Unlike Kim Wilde, the Priors did report the incident to the Ministry of Defence. The MoD were in the very last days of collating UFO data and closed their UFO project after 50 years just months later. I accessed the recently released files for June 2009 and found that the MoD description, recorded via the RAF base in High Wycombe, is the rather useless 'UFO'. In replying to the witnesses (dated the day their photo appeared in the paper), the MoD says: "We have received no other reports of UFO sightings" for that area

on that date.

However, June 2009 had 34 MoD sightings, and 11 were in the 24 hours surrounding Kim Wilde's encounter. Moreover, the vast majority featured multiple objects moving around in pairs, just as in her sighting. Indeed, in just an hour or so around the Welwyn events there were zig-zagging orange balls near Rotherham (10.25pm), six brilliant objects in pairs at Moreton in Marsh (10.35pm) and "nine objects like golden globes" which "hovered for a bit before shooting off" at midnight in Bow, London.

Some of these might also be laser shows or Chinese lanterns. In 2009, these were still quite novel and not readily recognised. Like much new technology before it becomes familiar, they were widely misreported as UFOs.

I have often found that such a sighting will burrow into a witness's consciousness and transmogrify through time, becoming something more exciting as they recall it. This works even if, over time, they become aware of the cause that probably triggered the sighting. By the time that they discover what that is, the memory has morphed into something rather stranger, and they are sure that it could not be the now perfectly explicable phenomenon, which seems much less strange than what they had witnessed years before. Such memory morphing is very evident in the history of UFO/IFO perception and is something to which we give little attention.

So, it is not clear what Kim Wilde saw that night in 2009. Was it really a UFO, or a laser show or fire lanterns? Clearly, something was up there, but aliens are another matter. What cannot be denied is the cultural impact that will grow as Kim embarks on her Spring 2018 tour, which will play heavily into a "sci-fi glam rock theme" with alien costumes and sets. The album cover, too, is a wonderful retro 'B movie' illustration, and the title track – with a 'Here come the aliens' chorus – is called '1969' and is based on the Moon landing memory that got the young singer interested in the idea of alien life. "I know they're watching me. I know they're hiding out there," she sings. Perhaps they are; but would they really visit the skies of Hertfordshire?

Whether the aliens really are 'out there' is largely irrelevant; Kim Wilde's story reveals that they are very much alive inside the human mind, perhaps making us feel less alone in a vast cosmos.



# The Entertainer, the President, and the Aliens

Have you heard the one about 1950s sitcom star Jackie Gleason, US President Richard Nixon, and the dead aliens? It's not the set-up for a joke but the 'true story' of an encounter between a famous entertainer and the corpses of several extraterrestrial entities, all arranged by a later-disgraced US President. **BRIAN J ROBB** tells all.

**B**orn in the middle of the First World War, Jackie Gleason grew up in Brooklyn, New York. The first strange event in Gleason's young life happened before he was even 10 years old. Shortly before Christmas in 1925, his father, Herbert, destroyed all the family photos in which he appeared, collected his pay check from the insurance office where he worked, and promptly vanished, never to be seen again.

Once it was clear this was no temporary vanishing act, Gleason's mother, Mae, got a job to help support her and her son, while young Jackie drifted into life as a junior member of a local gang. He quickly developed some skill as a pool hustler (skills that came in handy in his dramatic role as Minnesota Fats in the 1961 Paul Newman movie *The Hustler*) and dropped out of school. The teenage Gleason secured work front of house at a local theatre before putting together a knockabout comedy act with some friends.

A decade after her husband vanished, Mae Gleason died. Aged only 19, Jackie Gleason now had no home and no parents. He shackled up with some comedian friends in an overcrowded, low-rent New York hotel room. Soon his fortunes changed, as he started scoring work in New York's club scene, where his shtick quickly came to be insulting the paying clientele. Soon, he was signed up to a movie contract with Warner Bros at \$250 per week, more money than the young performer could ever imagine earning on stage.

Many films followed during the years of the Second World War, often pairing Gleason



LEFT: Jackie Gleason with fellow cast members Art Carney and Audrey Meadows in *The Honeymooners*.

series of long-running sitcom *The Life of Riley* in 1949-1950, before bringing his nightclub act to television as host of the variety format *The Jackie Gleason Show*. It was, however, with his role as blowhard bus driver Ralph Kramden in the sitcom *The Honeymooners* that Gleason really made his mark. The show found wide appeal through its depiction of an average American urban household of the 1950s,

## He had a little-known interest in the paranormal and unexplained

with established Warners gangster stars such as Humphrey Bogart (*All Through the Night*, 1941) and Edward G Robinson (*Larceny, Inc.*, 1942). A badly-healed broken left arm kept Gleason out of war service. Instead, he entertained off-duty troops, developing a raucous nightclub act that ran in tandem with his slow-burn film career.

### THE ENTERTAINER

It was, however, in the post-war world of television that Jackie Gleason won nationwide fame. He featured in the first

tinged with an aspirational edge as Gleason's Ralph sought the American dream. The show's classic status owes much to Gleason's foresight in having it recorded, allowing for constant reruns over the years. After *The Honeymooners*, his film career continued, from *The Hustler* right through to the trio of *Smokey and the Bandit* movies in the late-1970s and early-1980s. His fame secure, Gleason died in 1987, aged 71.

However, a little-known part of this very public showman's life was his deep interest in the paranormal and the unexplained, covering the entire gamut of what we might now regard as fortaean topics. According to biographer William A Henry in *The Great One: The Life and Legend of Jackie Gleason*, the entertainer had "a lifelong fascination with the supernatural. He would spend small fortunes on everything from financing psychic research to buying a sealed box said to contain actual ectoplasm, the spirit of life itself. He would contact everyone from back-alley charlatans to serious researchers like JB Rhine of Duke University and, disdaining







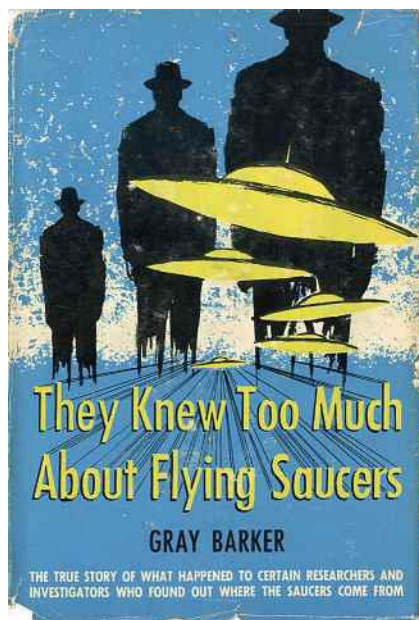
**ABOVE:** Radio host 'Long' John Nebel, on whose saucer-themed show Gleason offered a \$100,000 reward to anyone who could provide physical proof of aliens visiting Earth. **BELOW:** Gleason had an on-air ding-dong with Gray Barker, proponent of the Men in Black, on another instalment of Nebel's programme.

the elitism of the scholarly apparatus, would treat them all much the same way."

During the 1950s, he occasionally appeared on a paranormal themed overnight radio show hosted by 'Long' John Nebel (see **FT148:32-39**), whose shows featured discussions on flying saucers (this was only a few years after the Arnold sighting and the Roswell incident), the growing area of conspiracy theories, and such supernatural topics as ghosts and witchcraft. During one notable appearance in November 1958, Gleason laid into UFO researcher Gray Barker (see **FT50:63-69, 341:24**) on the air, accusing him of creating myths around his theories of the 'men in black' and of single-handedly building up the UFO contactee movement. It was on an instalment of the John Nebel show that Gleason offered a reward of \$100,000 to anyone who could provide incontrovertible physical proof that aliens had visited the Earth – an amount he would later increase to \$1 million. To his great frustration no one ever came forward to take him up on his offer.

Gleason was a voracious reader and bought just about every book ever published devoted to these topics, especially those on UFOs [He was also a subscriber to *Fortean Times* – Ed]. According to his biographer, "Gleason was a frequent insomniac. He would stay up through the night reading (or rereading) some of the hundreds of volumes in his library." After his death, his substantial library of paranormal and fortean literature was donated to the University of Miami. That library represented the largely private side of

*He offered a reward to anyone who could provide proof that aliens had visited the Earth*



Jackie Gleason that the movie-going and TV-watching public rarely saw. It was, however, an interest he could pursue in unique ways given the access to people in high places that his fame afforded him.

#### THE PRESIDENT

Richard Nixon (see **FT241:56-57**) was the 37th President of the United States, who came to the job having served in Congress and the Senate and as Vice President to Dwight D Eisenhower. He'd memorably challenged John F Kennedy for the presidency in 1960, losing narrowly. After a period in the wilderness following Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Nixon made a comeback in 1968, finally winning the presidency.

This was the start of a troubled age for the White House, with Nixon embroiled in controversy almost from his 1969 inauguration until his resignation in 1974, taking in such problems as relations with China, the Vietnam war, and civil liberties. The cover-up of the Watergate scandal finally brought down Nixon, making him the first American president to resign (as he was facing impeachment) from office.

Conspiracy-minded as he was, it is no surprise to discover that Nixon was interested in many subjects that might be categorised as 'woo woo'. It has been said that he regularly consulted with 'psychic' and astrologer Jeane Dixon (who'd predicted Kennedy's assassination back in 1956), whom he regarded as the White House's 'official' fortune-teller (see **FT243:32-39**). She would go on to advise Nancy Reagan, wife of the

40th President. John Keel claimed that he perceived “sinister figures of gaunt, evil aspect” surrounding Nixon during his inauguration, apparently another avatar of Barker’s ‘men in black’.

Nixon happened to be in office when Kennedy’s ‘space race’ to the Moon came to fruition in June 1969 when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to walk on another world, an event he was only too happy to take credit for. Later that year in December, under Nixon’s watch, Project Blue Book – the US government investigation of UFOs – was shut down. Publically, Nixon dissociated himself from any connection with flying saucers, turning down an invitation to the World Congress for the International Consideration of Non-Terrestrial Spacecraft Operation with the pithy note: “There is no evidence that UFOs are extraterrestrial”.

### ...AND THE ALIENS

It was during an eventful game of golf between Jackie Gleason and President Nixon on 19 February 1973 that, somewhere around the 15th hole, the question of aliens came up. That’s according to Beverly McKittrick (the comedian’s second wife), whose unpublished memoir of their marriage includes her account of the day her husband returned home late at night “badly shaken”, not due to the golf game but what had happened with Nixon afterwards.

Gleason was a fervent Nixon supporter who’d helped the President’s campaign by staging a number of fundraising dinners. The President enjoyed a lot of celebrity support, including some prominent people from usually left-leaning Hollywood such as Bob Hope, John Wayne, Ray Bolger (the scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz*), Ginger Rogers, and Rudy Vallée.

The golf game saw the friends’ conversation turn to the subject of mutual interests. Gleason’s long-term interest in strange phenomena came up. Nixon, always keen to impress his celebrity friends, saw an opening. He promised Gleason he could prove the existence of aliens, that the stories of flying saucers having crashed on Earth were true, and he’d be willing to show him some day...

Gleason may have taken Nixon’s revelations as an empty boast, but for the fact that later that same evening the President turned up at his Florida home in Key Biscayne, without any of the usual secret service bodyguards. The President was alone and told the surprised Gleason to get into his car. The President then supposedly drove his celebrity pal to Homestead Air Force Base, 35 miles (56km) southwest of Miami.

Obviously, it was easy for the US President to gain access to the base, although the guards might have raised an eyebrow at both the fact he was without his security entourage and was, instead, in the company of the star of *The Honeymooners*. Nixon drove deep into the base, stopping at a heavily guarded but otherwise anonymous building.

According to Gleason’s purported testimony this is what the comedian saw that night on an American Air Force base in the company of the US President: “There were a number of labs we passed through first before we entered a section where Nixon pointed out what he said was the wreckage from a flying saucer, enclosed in several large cases. Next, we went into an inner chamber and there were six or eight of what looked like glass-topped Coke freezers. Inside them were the mangled remains of what I took to be children...”

What he saw that night changed Gleason.

The easy-going comedian was shocked by the President’s revelation not only that aliens existed, but that the authorities had secured the corpses of a handful of them. He had trouble sleeping and eating. His routine was thrown off and, to begin with, his wife had no idea why. One night, Gleason broke down and told her everything – at least according to Beverly’s later account. She was sworn to secrecy, a promise that would be threatened when the pair separated and then divorced the following year.

Beverly figured the only way she could deal with the divorce was to cash in on her husband’s fame by writing a book about their relationship. That would be par for the course, so she had to find a story that would make her book unique, different from all those other celebrity hanger-on memoirs. Supposedly, during an interview in 1983 with that bastion of truthful journalism the *National Enquirer* (often mistakenly reported to have been in *Esquire*, and almost a decade earlier in 1974) to promote the book – which was then in progress, but ultimately never published – she decided to reveal Gleason’s encounter with the President and the aliens.

Hoping the story would be regarded as the ravings of a woman scorned, Gleason wisely kept quiet. The tale of the day President Nixon showed aliens to Jackie Gleason faded away, only kept alive by the small community of UFO enthusiasts. Gleason’s interest in everything fortaean didn’t fade, however. The year before he died, he contacted Saucer evangelist, former American Air Force Security officer, and purported Rendlesham Forest UFO witness Larry Warren; the entertainer was finally ready to talk, to unburden himself of his secret.

According to Warren, Gleason told him the whole story confirming what his wife had

COURTESY JEANNE DIXON MUSEUM



ABOVE LEFT: Nixon meets Dixon; the President was said to have consulted the White House’s ‘official psychic’. ABOVE RIGHT: Nixon and Gleason enjoy a round of golf.



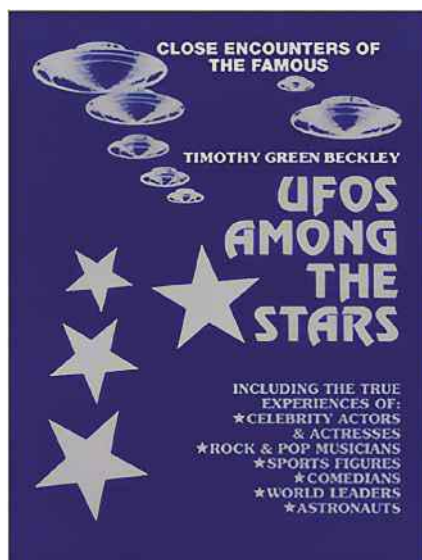


ABOVE: The unlikely story of Gleason and the dead aliens, as seen in the *National Enquirer* in 1983 and *News Extra* in 1987. BELOW: Timothy Green Beckley's 1992 book links the Gleason story to Rendlesham witness Larry Warren. BOTTOM: Gleason with second wife Beverly McKittrick, source of the 'revelations'.

claimed three years before. Gleason died in 1987, leaving behind just two people who could authenticate the story he'd told. Those two – neither of them, arguably, the world's most reliable witness – kept the story alive, especially Warren who used it as part of his mystique within the UFO community. The impact of the Internet on the flying saucer myth saw the Gleason/Nixon/Alis story become one of the core tenets of those who believed that the American government was covering up the reality of alien contact.

#### THE TRUTH (MAYBE)

So, what's the truth? Did President Nixon reveal alien bodies to entertainer Jackie Gleason? It's a great story, but the sources are less than great. Beverly McKittrick's 'revelations' to the *National Enquirer* were headlined "Jackie Gleason Saw Bodies of



Space Aliens at Air Force Base" and is pretty much up (or down) to their standard fare.

Beverly's August 1983 interview is written up as a first-person account of events, even though she's (at best) telling the tale second-hand. She put words in Gleason's mouth, describing the aliens: "They were tiny, only about two feet tall, with small bald heads and disproportionately big ears [eyes, surely?]. They must've been dead for sometime because they'd been embalmed." She then said that an unnamed American astronaut who appeared on a TV show with the comedian had backed up Gleason's tale with his own encounter with the ETs. After the show, the pair compared notes, with the astronaut confirming Gleason's belief that the aliens were here. She maintained that her husband was furious that the government wouldn't come clean about them. As if her claims were not crazy enough, she also added that Gleason believed in reincarnation and felt he'd lived before as "a swashbuckling English duke in the days of King Henry VIII".

While Larry Warren is notorious in UFO circles, his part in the story may not actually be his fault. The account that links him to the 'Gleason and the aliens' story comes from 'paranormal investigator' Timothy Green Beckley's 1992 book of 'true' celebrity alien encounters, *UFO's Among the Stars*. A chapter headed "Jackie Gleason & the Little 'Men from Mars'" reports the encounter between Warren and Gleason in which the comedian supposedly finally unburdened himself.

Beckley's secondhand account begins with a claim that Gleason's office contacted him directly, requesting a copy of a previous booklet he'd written on the topic of UFOs. That much is certainly possible, given Gleason's interest in the subject and the books in his donated library. That Beckley then connects his version of the story to Larry Warren, already regarded as a problematic witness in one UFO encounter, should perhaps serve as a warning sign.

Beckley attributes the following account of the May 1986 meeting with Gleason at his home in Westchester County, New York, to



PHOTO BY ROLLS PRESS / POPPERFOTO / GETTY IMAGES



## JACKIE GLEASON'S UFO HOUSE



Built of circular units connected by sweeping curved stairways, the "Studio," as Gleason calls it, sits lightly on its hilltop for all its bulk. Window walls open the view to the woods on all sides

Circular studio room is equipped with connections for broadcasting and recording equipment. Gleason plans to originate some TV programs from the house



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Massive triple fireplace in the living room faces three living zones. It is built into a marble chimney that is 40 feet tall and weighs 240 tons



POPULAR MECHANICS



In the living room, all the furnishings, even to rounded rugs and accessories, carry out the circular design theme. Walls radiate inward from the perimeter and open in the center to connect the rooms without doors

THE MANY TALENTS and accomplishments of Jackie Gleason would put him out of the ordinary class of home builders. And Round Rock Hill, his new home on the outskirts of Peekskill, N. Y., is just that—out of the ordinary. Built on top of a hill in the center of nine acres of dense woodland, the house provides the comedian-composer-actor with "a pattern for living and working" — it contains his office and a broadcasting studio as well as his home.

Everything about the home is round. There's an eight-foot round bed with a built-in television set in the ceiling above it; a round shower room in glass and tile; round and semicircular rugs and furniture. Even the stairways curve to match the curve of the outside walls. In the center of the round living room is a huge triple fireplace. The studio room focuses on a grand piano.

The house is built on three levels across the 175-foot front elevation. Glass walls everywhere look out over the wooded hills. ★ ★ ★

APRIL 1960

Even the storage building on the grounds is round, almost top-shaped. The only other building visible from the main house is the eight-room stone guest house not seen here



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Jackie Gleason's interest in UFOs even extended to the building of his own home. He had architects design the house he was building in Peekskill, New York, to resemble a flying saucer. Dubbed by Gleason the 'mother ship', the building was constructed

to be round in shape, and Gleason followed through by having much of his bespoke furniture built the same way. The edifice was topped by an all-glass dome in which Gleason kept his stargazing telescopes, ever ready to catch a glimpse of

passing UFOs. Even the garage, which Gleason called the 'scout ship' was round (although his car presumably was not).

*Popular Mechanics* profiled Gleason's unique home in an April 1960 issue, complete with photos of the interior and the

exterior. Built on a nine-acre site, the house included Gleason's office, multiple bars, a working Tesla coil, and even a studio for broadcasting from — all round, of course. It might have appeared to be an April Fools' joke, but it was all true.

Warren: "Jackie Gleason was interested in hearing my [Rendlesham] story first hand... There were hundreds of UFO books all over the place, but Jackie was quick to tell me that this was only a tiny portion of his entire collection. I remember Gleason telling me about his own sightings of several discs in Florida and how he thought there were undersea UFOs bases out in the Bermuda Triangle. At some point, Gleason turned to me and said, 'I want to tell you something very amazing that will probably come out some day anyway. We've got em!' 'Got what,' I wanted to know? 'Aliens!' Gleason sputtered, catching his breath." There follows an account of that February night, purportedly in Gleason's own words, that adds saucer wreckage to the *National Enquirer* story of

## The astronaut confirmed Gleason's belief that the aliens were here

alien bodies for good measure. Overall, this piece could easily have been based upon that *Enquirer* story (which it mentions), with a heavy dose of imaginative reconstruction thrown in, and offers no other separate evidence at all.

According to Larry Bryant, editor of the *Just Cause UFO* newsletter (to which Gleason was a subscriber), Hollywood got interested in the tale of the *Honeymooners* star and the President's night out with the aliens. Gleason reportedly rebuffed the interest shown by Hollywood in his story while neither confirming nor denying any of it. As Bryant noted: "Gleason easily could have set the record straight... in an explanation to the inquisitive film industry representative. If the story was a fabrication or misinterpretation on the part of his wife, he now had every opportunity to say so. That he chose not to merely deepens the mystery." Perhaps, as a fan of the UFO mythos, Gleason knew a good story when he saw one and decided to say nothing and thereby further fuel the mystery.





**ABOVE LEFT:** Homestead Air Force Base, where President Nixon is alleged to have shown Gleason the alien corpses. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The comedian and the President share a joke in 1973. **BELOW:** A bookplate from the University of Miami's collection of Gleason's 1,700 volumes relating to mostly forteen topics.

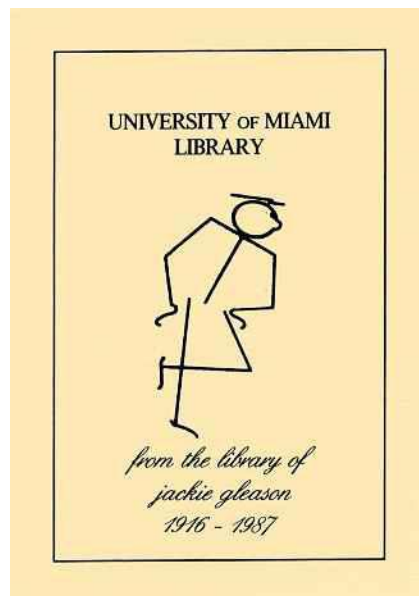
### THE NEED TO BELIEVE

Why does this tale persist, when it is a house of cards built upon the flimsiest evidence? Richard Nixon is such a discredited figure in American politics that people seem willing to believe almost anything said of him or attributed to him. There's also the celebrity factor. Although not particularly well remembered now, except by vintage television buffs, Jackie Gleason was a huge star of the 1950s and 1960s, the period when television made the biggest inroads into American homes. He was a figure those audiences invited in, someone they liked, trusted and believed, regardless of what he may actually have been like off-screen.

Add to these impulses two easily verifiable facts. Nixon was indeed in Florida on 19 February 1973, according to official records, and he even played golf. The event was Jackie Gleason's annual golf tournament at the Inverrary Golf and Country Club, and the President spent a total of around 40 minutes playing and mixing with those in attendance, including Gleason.

There's nothing in the President's diary about a one-on-one discussion with Gleason about flying saucers, still less a record of him giving his Secret Service entourage the slip in order to go for a late-night joyride with the comedian. That's not to say it was impossible. In his book *Confessions of an Ex-Secret Service Agent*, former spook Martin Venker claimed that not only could the President disappear, but it had already happened.

Venker stated that in 1973 – the year of Gleason's close encounter – Nixon had tried to cut back on his Secret Service protection. During this time, it was apparently not



uncommon for Nixon to attempt to elude his Secret Service detail. Agents who worked on the Nixon Presidential detail were warned of the tendency of the Commander in Chief to go AWOL. Given everything else we know that Nixon was up to, this is perhaps not all that hard to believe. After all, Homestead was the same base where President Eisenhower was said to have met the aliens while they were still alive... but that's a whole other story.

The second undeniable fact is that, unlikely as it might have seemed to those 1950s and 1960s audiences who enjoyed *The Honeymooners* in endless reruns, the man who played the solidly down-to-earth Ralph Kramden really did have a strong interest in the supernatural and otherworldly. His participation in those

late-night radio shows with John Nebel can be listened to at any time, thanks to the Internet. The University of Miami now holds among its libraries' special collections one called 'The Jackie Gleason Collection'. According to the university, this includes "approximately 1,700 volumes of books, journals, proceedings, pamphlets, and publications in the field of parapsychology, and a lesser quantity of titles relating to the entertainment industry. The Gleason Collection includes both scholarly and popular works published in the United States and abroad. Within the field of parapsychology, the collection offers materials on such topics as: witchcraft, folklore, extrasensory perception (ESP), unidentified flying objects (UFOs), reincarnation, mysticism, spiritualism, mental telepathy, the occult, ghosts, clairvoyance, cosmology, demons, hypnosis, life after death, mediums, psychical research, voodooism, and others".

Add to that the story planted in the *National Enquirer* by his unhappy ex-wife and the exploitation of that story by one or two doubtful figures in the UFO community, mix it with the public's 'need to believe' and you have the ultimate celebrity/political/alien encounter tale that can be endlessly repeated on the Internet and retold in articles like this one. As Gleason's Ralph Kramden often said on *The Honeymooners*: 'To the Moon Alice!'

◆ **BRIAN J ROBB** is a regular contributor to *FT* and a New York Times best-selling author whose books include *Counterfeit Worlds: Philip K Dick on Film, Screams & Nightmares: The Films of Wes Craven*, and *Timeless Adventures: How Doctor Who Conquered TV*.

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David, 9 September

"Thank you and we would  
buy through you again"

★★★★★

Clancy, 21 August

"I'm loving my new ride.  
I would recommend  
this service to anyone"

★★★★★

Tatiana, 8 September



# The Baffling Books of Bruno Borges

IAN SIMMONS looks at the strange case of Bruno Borges, a young Brazilian student who vanished mysteriously in March 2017, leaving behind a locked room full of coded manuscripts, pictures of aliens and a life-size statue of a Renaissance hermeticist.

Having completed one article on mysterious encrypted manuscripts<sup>1</sup> I did not expect to come across any new ones for a good while, but in March 2017 I was proved to be wrong, when another 14 turned up – and with a very peculiar story attached.

On 27 March 2017, 24-year-old Brazilian psychology student Bruno Borges was reported missing by his family; he had walked out of their home in Rio Branco after lunch, dressed in just a shirt and shorts and without any money, and had failed to return home. This, in itself, would not be a reason for international headlines and fevered conjecture, but what his parents found when they broke into his locked room certainly was – particularly after a video of its contents was posted to YouTube.<sup>2</sup>

Borges's parents had been away for 24 days just prior to his disappearance and had only recently returned. According to his sister Gabriella, during this whole period Bruno had spent most of his time sequestered in his room, which he kept locked around the clock, working on a mysterious secret project. She was quoted in the *Daily Express* as saying: "He said it was his project. I questioned him because I, as a sister, didn't know what the project was, and he told me that he would tell me what it was in two weeks. He was an adult and it was his privacy – it bothered me, but I couldn't exactly break down the door. He only told me that he was writing 14 books that would change mankind in a good way and that he wanted to patent them because he had created a new theory." The room indeed contained the 14 books – each in a ring-bound notebook, numbered with large red Roman numerals, and encrypted in an indecipherable code – but a lot else besides. Bruno had removed all his furniture, and the walls of his room were covered with dense text, much of it in the same code, along with a profusion of



LEFT: The slightly mysterious Bruno Borges, no relation to Giordano Bruno or Jorge Luis Borges.

portrait of a staring-eyed Borges accompanied by a grey alien, and another showing him in a cowled robe. In the centre of the room, standing in an alchemical transmutation circle, was a substantial life-size statue of the Renaissance hermeticist Giordano Bruno (see FT277:38-43).

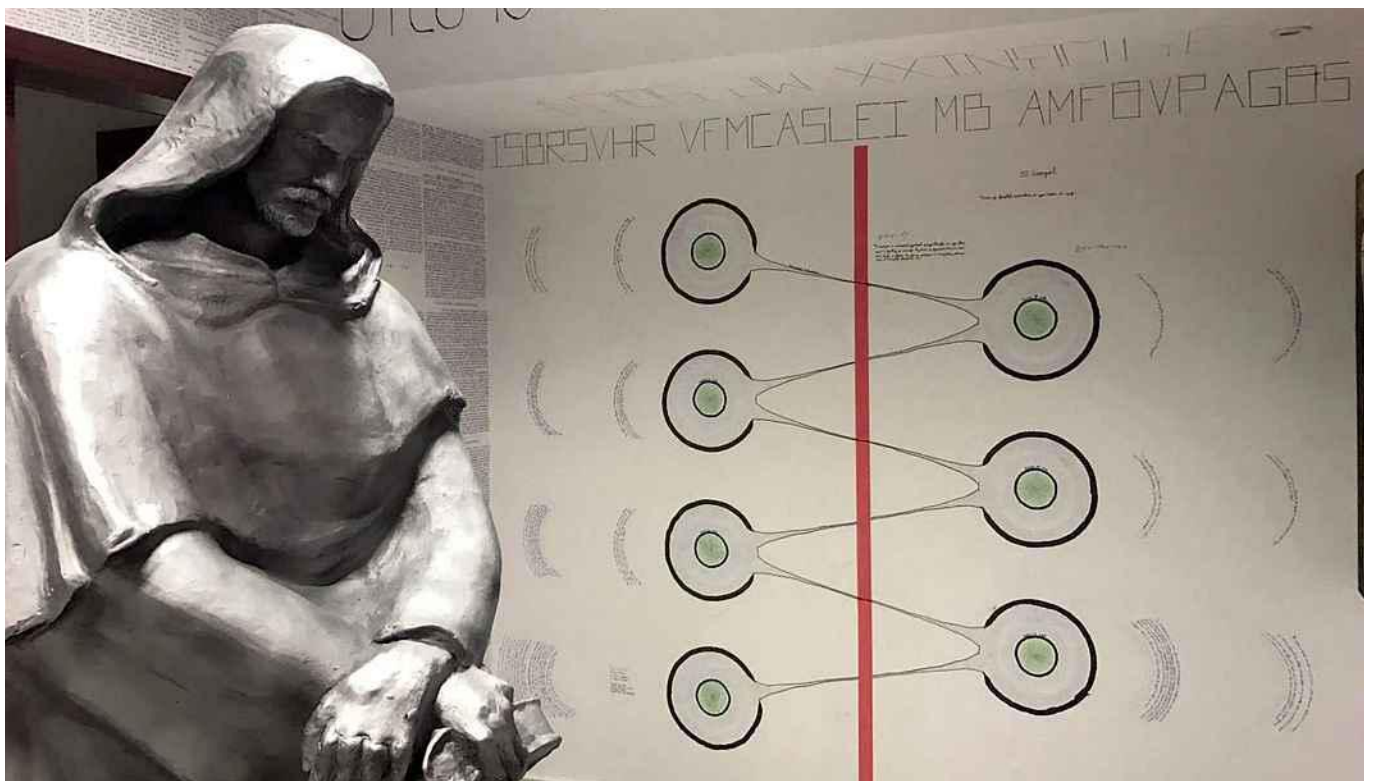
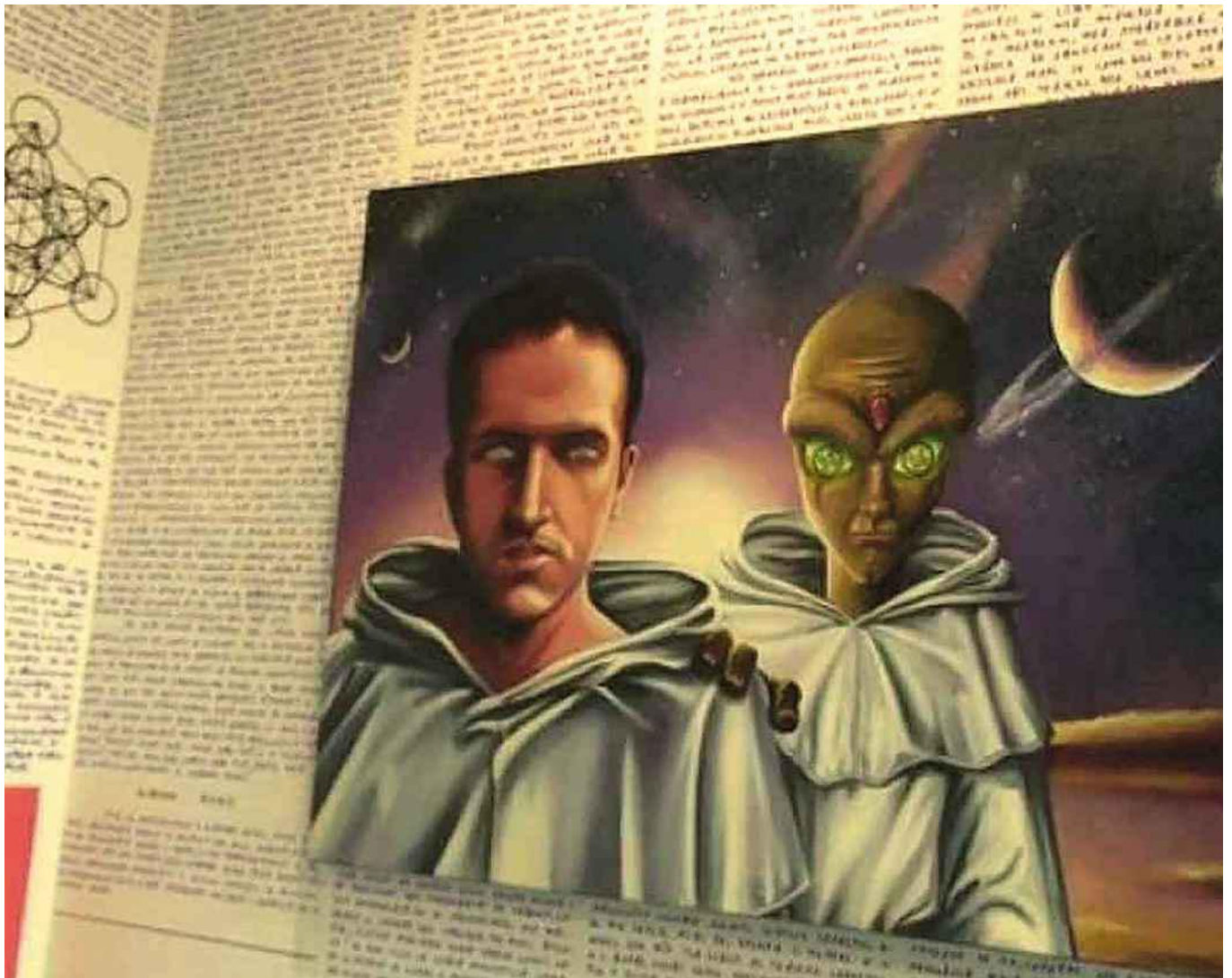
## BRUNO'S BOOKS

With Borges missing, the focus of interest centred on the encrypted books, the statue and the alien painting, leading to feverish speculation as to his motives and fate. Working from images posted on line, several people around the world made attempts to crack the code in the books, and Bruno's parents employed their own cryptographer to try and get to the bottom of their content and discover if they held any clues as to their son's whereabouts. Others made imaginative links between the materials they could comprehend. Noting that Giordano Bruno was one of the first people to speculate about the existence of planets outside the

Solar System and the possibility of life on them, many made the connection between the statue and the painting and decided that Borges had been trying to complete Bruno's work and make contact with aliens. Others took this further, speculating that he'd succeeded and had been abducted as a result. British tabloid the *Sun* took an even larger leap in logic and dubbed Giordano Bruno a "16<sup>th</sup> Century Alien Hunter" in its coverage of the disappearance.<sup>3</sup> It was also noted that the date of Bruno's disappearance was close to being 20 years to the day that the mass-suicide of the Heaven's Gate cultists were found (26 March 1997; see FT100:34-41). The Heaven's Gate suicide house had a portrait of an alien as well,

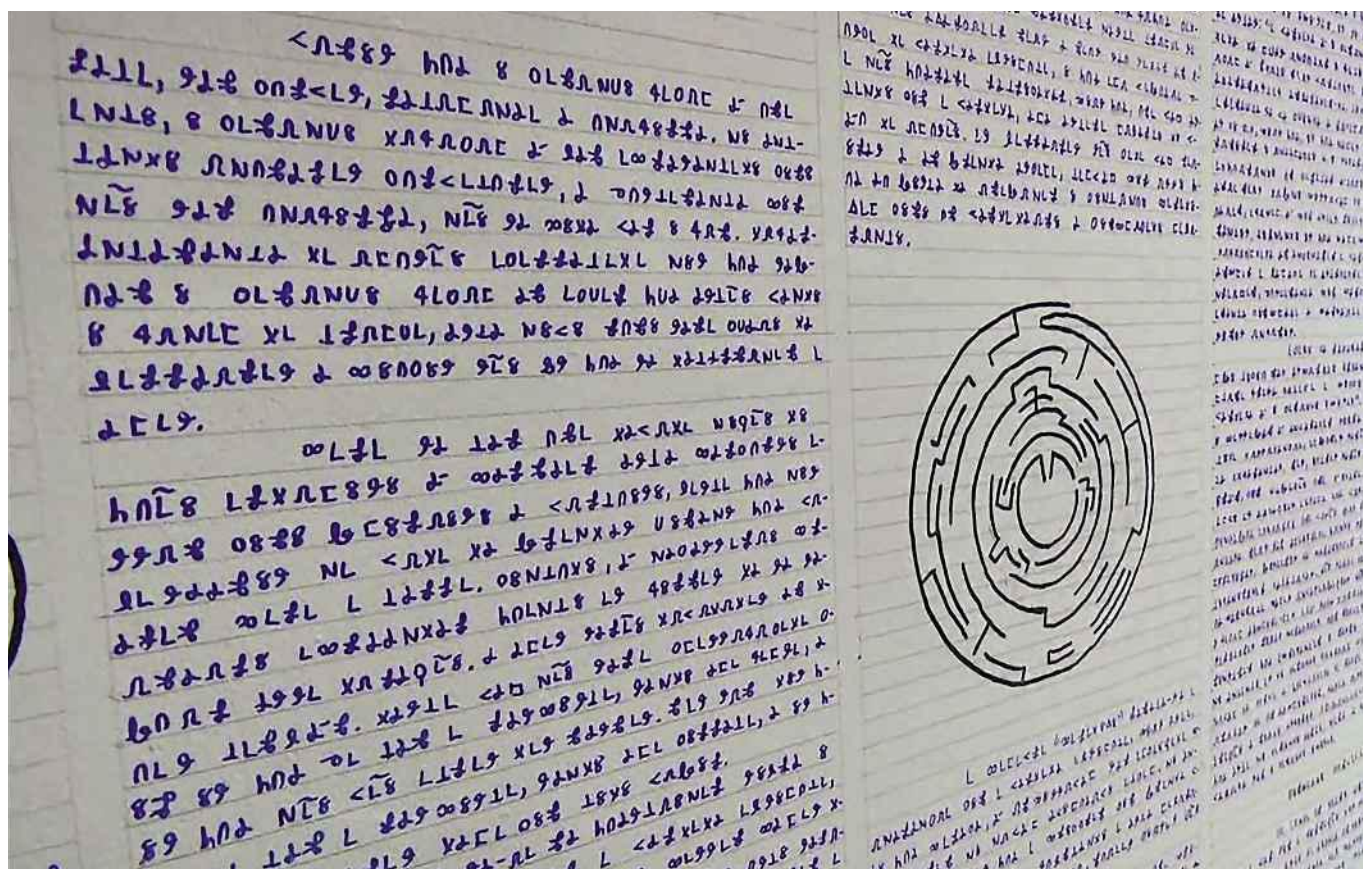
*Some thought he had been trying to make contact with aliens*

biblical passages, occult symbols, alchemical formulae, as well as references to aliens, magical objects, and the works of Leonardo da Vinci. There was also an unsettling self-



ABOVE: What had Bruno been up to in his locked bedroom? Removing the furniture and installing a life-size statue of Giordano Bruno amongst other things...





ABOVE: The walls of Bruno's room were covered with coded texts and he'd laid out 14 mysterious volumes, each numbered with a large red Roman numeral.



entitled “How a Member of the Kingdom of Heaven might appear”.

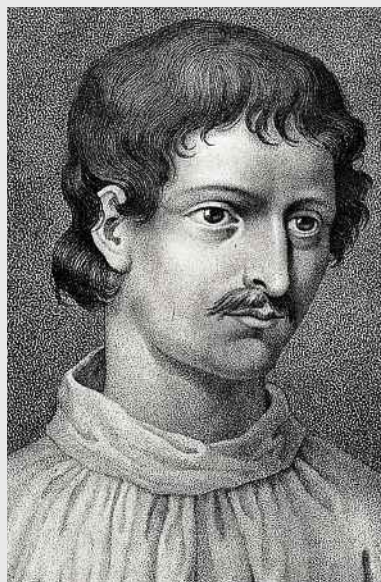
The feverish speculation was also notched up a level when it was noted that not only did Bruno Borges share a name with Giordano Bruno (as well as, rather pleasingly, with Jorge Luis Borges, author of elegant and convoluted literary fantasies), he also looked uncannily like him, adding another layer of speculation to the mix: that Borges was not only continuing Bruno’s work, but was actually a reincarnation of the philosopher. Inevitably, this was soon taken even further, leading to the idea that since Borges couldn’t be found and a mysterious life-size statue of Bruno had appeared out of nowhere in his room, he had not actually vanished but had rather turned himself into the statue by occult means.

One of the more intriguing leads came from the images on the wall, particularly one of a cicada. This was not just a random picture of an insect, it was a very specific cicada: the logo of a mysterious organisation (or maybe an individual; no-one is sure) known as Cicada 3301. Cicada 3301 emerged in 2012, when it posted a set of mysterious puzzles and challenged people to solve them, something it has done now on six occasions. These have the stated intention of “recruiting highly intelligent individuals”, but the organisation behind the puzzles and their motivation in recruiting such people remains a mystery. However, it was noted that Giordano Bruno was born on Mount Cicada (Monte Cicala in Italian) <sup>4</sup> in Italy, 464 years before the first Cicada puzzles were posted; and that 3301 is the 464<sup>th</sup> prime number. Known as a very intelligent individual, and clearly interested in cryptography, Borges seemed to be just the kind of person Cicada 3301 would be interested in seeking out – so perhaps he had vanished into the secretive organisation? More prosaically, it was also suggested that Borges was at an age when schizophrenia commonly starts to show itself, and that all of these supposed mysteries showed nothing more than the symptoms of a florid breakdown.

#### WHERE’S BRUNO?

Parallel with this ramping up of speculation, the investigations being carried out by Borges’s family and the police started to bear fruit. They ascertained that when Bruno had left the house he’d taken a backpack and a computer hard drive with him, had walked for a kilometre and then taken a taxi to a motel 15 minutes away. Despite the taxi driver seeing him enter the motel grounds, he was found not to have checked into the motel itself. However, the motel backs on to woodland regularly used for late-night gatherings of some kind, according to one local resident, who also claimed he’d been invited to take part in prayers or rituals there, which raised the possibility that Borges was joining a cult of some kind. Further evidence seemed to

## GIORDANO BRUNO



**ABOVE:** Some have suggested that G Bruno (left) and Bruno B (right) bear a striking resemblance to one another. **BELOW:** The statue of Giordano Bruno in Rome’s Campo de Fiori.

Born Filippo Bruni in the city of Nola, close to Naples, near Monte Cicala in 1548. Giordano Bruno was a Dominican friar and Neoplatonist philosopher, known for controversial views and outspoken behaviour. An expert on the art of memory, he was also a prominent early supporter of Copernican cosmology, which demonstrated that the Earth orbited the Sun, rather than the then-accepted Aristotelian view that taught the opposite and was supported by the Church. He also had a talent for rubbing people up the wrong way, which resulted in him leading a peripatetic existence around Europe, repeatedly fleeing cities where he had offended either the Church or the secular powers, or both. This included a period in England where he moved in the same circles as Dr John Dee and spied on Catholics for Sir Francis Walsingham. During his wanderings he published books on memory, which expounded his complex system of mnemonics,

as well as volumes on philosophy and cosmology, expanding on Copernicus’s ideas to speculate about the existence of worlds around other stars, and the possibility that they might be inhabited.

This, along with other beliefs, resulted in him being tried for blasphemy and heresy, first in Venice, then in Rome; but whereas Galileo, accused of similar transgressions, at least partially recanted and came to a compromise with the Church, Bruno refused to do so and was declared a heretic by Pope Clement VIII. As a result, he was hung upside down and naked, and then burned at the stake in February 1600 in the Campo de Fiori in Rome. His ashes were then thrown in the Tiber and all his books placed on the Vatican’s *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. One of the first Cicada 3301 posters appeared on the base of the statue of Bruno in the Campo de Fiori.





support this. A dressmaker was located who had made Borges three cloaks, like those in which he is seen in the paintings. She had asked him whether it was for the church, and he had replied “almost that”. Investigation of the mysterious statue bore fruit too. It had been specially commissioned by Borges from a Peruvian sculptor, Jorge Rivas Plata, who had charged less for it than he normally would because he admired Borges’s ideas. Borges had borrowed the money to pay for it, equivalent to £2,000, from a cousin.

Progress was made on the cryptography front too, helped by the fact that Borges had left behind a typewriter keyboard with some of the symbols used taped to the keys, giving the cryptographers a kind of Rosetta Stone for his work. Although the popular view when the books were first found was that they had been written in some kind of hermetic cipher, perhaps based on Enochian, possibly uncrackable, or in some Cicada 3301-inspired code, the truth turned out to be a little less impressive. The code was a relatively simple substitution cipher and came from *The Junior Woodchuck’s Guide*, a Ladybird-like children’s book published by Disney. This enabled amateur code-breakers following the story to start unravelling the content of the 14 books and the wall text. A website devoted to the task was set up, called ‘Decipher the Book’.<sup>5</sup> This swiftly started to churn out deciphered versions of Borges’s text, but the results were somewhat less than enlightening, for example:

*“It is easy to accept what you have been taught since childhood and what is wrong. It is difficult, as an adult, to understand that you were wrongly taught what you suspected was correct since you were a child. In other words, if you fit into the system, your behaviour will be determined, making you at the mercy of beliefs already provided and well established in dogmas and rituals, with the masses.”*

Or:

*“For it goes head-on with the laws of the universe, where everything is relative and in eternal change. Such theories were defended by the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus, who said that everything was changing. The idle man delights in failure, the creator already finds in his own inventions, which are fruits of sweat and dedication, virtue itself.”*

Not exactly world-shattering revelations, but exactly the kind of thing you might get from a callow 25-year-old who had done too much undisciplined reading of philosophy and mysticism and had a rather over-generous estimation of his own insights. His family, though, thought they were immensely important, and Bruno’s father vowed to ‘patent’<sup>6</sup> the books so they would reach a wider audience and change the world.

A further curious aspect of the mystery was the whereabouts of the furniture that had vanished from Borges’s room. His sister had not, apparently, seen him remove it, and it was nowhere in the house. However, two months after the disappearance it



## There was the possibility that Borges was joining a cult of some kind

was found in the house of one of Borges’s friends, Marcio Gaiote, who confessed that during the 24-day period when Borges had been creating the mysterious room, he and another friend, Marcello Ferreira, had helped him move the furniture out of the house and had hidden it at Gaiote’s place. Further investigation turned up a contract, found in Ferreira’s house. It had been notarised by Bruno Borges on the day he disappeared, and promised Ferreira, Gaiote

ABOVE: Cicada 3301 puzzles have popped up in all sorts of places; this one appeared in a Polish street last year.

and Eduardo Velloso, the cousin who had lent him the statue money, 15 per cent of the sales revenue from Borges’s books when published. While the specific books were not defined, it was assumed that it meant the 14 encrypted books found in his room. This, along with the suspicion that the room was rather too neatly presented, that too many convenient clues, such as the marked-up keyboard, had been left, and aspects of the Borges family’s statements and behaviour cast the whole affair in a somewhat different light: could the mysterious disappearance, and the hermetic trappings surrounding it, be a contrived publicity stunt to drum up interest and attract a publisher for Borges’s books? That was certainly the conclusion

# THE MANY PUZZLES OF CICADA 3301

Cicada 3301 first made itself known in 2012, when it released online a set of puzzles and alternate reality games, supported by posters in physical locations around the world. It has done this again on a further five occasions, which made up three rounds of puzzles. In each round, those who answered the puzzles successfully were asked increasingly complex and individualised questions, and allegedly, if ultimately successful, were invited into a private forum to devise ideas to further the aims of the group. Who Cicada 3301 are, and what their ultimate aim is, remains mysterious; it is not even known whether they are, in fact a group, or whether Cicada 3301 is the cryptographical equivalent of Banksy. Their only stated aim is to “recruit intelligent



individuals”. Inevitably, the finger has been pointed at all the usual suspects, with speculation that the puzzles are a recruitment tool for the NSA, CIA, MI6, a “Masonic conspiracy” or a cyber-mercenary group, possibly Russian, such as Fancy Bear or Sandworm. Alternately, it has been proposed that the whole thing is an elaborate fantasy game; but given that, five

years in, no one has claimed responsibility or tried to cash in on it, this is probably not the case. However, Cicada 3301 has released a statement, saying that they typically use non-puzzle-based recruiting methods, but created the Cicada puzzles because they were looking for potential members with cryptography and computer security skills. Solving Cicada 3301 puzzles is not

a trivial undertaking; they have required competitors to travel to multiple cities worldwide to retrieve clues and have used an eclectic range of references within the puzzles. These have included William Gibson and Robert Anton Wilson books, Mayan numerology, steganography, the Atbash cipher, Godel’s incompleteness theorem, MC Escher, Zen, Gematria, Crowley, Pre-Raphaelite painting and cuneiform. They have also communicated clues by many different means: Internet, telephone, original music, bootable Linux CDs, digital images, physical paper signs, and pages of unpublished cryptic books. They have been accused of being a cult, and also of being a criminal gang, but no one is even clear why they are called Cicada, and what the significance of 3301 is.

the Brazilian authorities came to; but it still didn’t get investigators any close to actually finding Borges himself.

## BIG IN BRAZIL

By July, Bruno Borges’s parents had made considerable headway with translating his 14 volumes of encrypted text and had found a publisher for them; the first book, entitled *TAC-Knowledge Absorption Theory* was due out on 1 July through publishers Infinity Editorial and Marketing. This gave some insight into Borges’s thinking: there was nothing about aliens or Giordano Bruno, but much praise for ‘asexual sages’, including Leonardo da Vinci, Jesus Christ, Plato, Heraclitus, Isaac Newton, Nikola Tesla, and, erm, Michael Jackson (no women), a good deal of ascetic, body-denying gnosticism, a rigid anti-drug, pro-vegetarian stance, condemnation of fat people, and some rather evasively phrased and qualified admiration for Hitler. Not, perhaps, what followers of the Bruno Borges saga were expecting.

The huge interest in the Borges disappearance in Brazil guaranteed that the book immediately became a bestseller, and work continued to bring the remaining volumes into print. Then, just as abruptly as he had disappeared, on 11 August 2017, a thin, barefoot and dishevelled Bruno Borges turned up at his parents’ house, creating another media furore. He expressed remorse for worrying his family and explained that he had gone into isolation to “seek something, a truth within me that I needed to find”. He

would not reveal where he had been for all this time, claiming that he’d had no access to outside information and had been unaware of all the fuss he’d caused. However, the vanishing did seem to be a calculated plan to promote his books, as he also told the Brazilian TV programme *Fantastico*: “All I did was with the main purpose of encouraging people to acquire knowledge, and as you see that people began to seek knowledge through this, we can see that it worked.” He insisted that his motive had not been financial gain, citing the contract that promised a share of the proceeds to his friends.

What neither Borges himself, nor the material that has been published so far have done, is unravel the thicket of esoteric references Borges has woven around himself. Where Giordano Bruno comes into it; if, and how, Cicada 3301 had any actual involvement; what aliens have to do with any of this; and how the remaining occult symbolism relates to his work – all of this remains unclear. *TAC* seems primarily to be about promoting a rather austere form of spiritual enquiry and expressing rather prolix New Age influenced truisms of the kind translated above, possibly with the intention of setting Borges up as some kind of guru figure. Until the remaining volumes are decoded and published, the suspicion remains that it was all just flamboyant window dressing to promote some rather banal and muddled mystic ramblings.

What has happened subsequently though, is that Borges has opened his room to the

public. He explains: “The room is open for anyone who wants to see. There is a trail in it, which hardly anyone noticed... it’s a work of art that should be an inspiration for people, because it has the spiritual part of that project too... I always open the gate for those who arrive wanting to see.”

As long as they pay the entry charge of course...

## NOTES

1 “Manuscripts of Mystery”, **FT345:38-43**.

2 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGE4Z1WlyI4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGE4Z1WlyI4)

3 [www.thesun.co.uk/news/3262463/illuminati-obsessed-student-bruno-borges-vanishes-brazil-alien-hunter/](http://www.thesun.co.uk/news/3262463/illuminati-obsessed-student-bruno-borges-vanishes-brazil-alien-hunter/)

4 Giordano Bruno also includes a character named Cicada in one of his books, *Eroici Furori*. He features in a dialogue with the poet Tansillo.

5 <http://decifreolivro.com/>

6 The Borges family and others repeatedly refer to ‘patenting’ the books. I assumed they mean ‘publish’ and this was simply a quirk of translation from the original Brazilian Portuguese, but it seems not to be the case, as they are quite different words in Portuguese. As it stands, you cannot patent either books or philosophical ideas. Patents can only be granted to inventions (including software), in any field of technology, provided they are new, involve an inventive step, and are capable of industrial application. I would be interested to see an industrial application for the Bruno Borges texts.

◆ IAN SIMMONS is a regular contributor to FT and a science communications consultant.



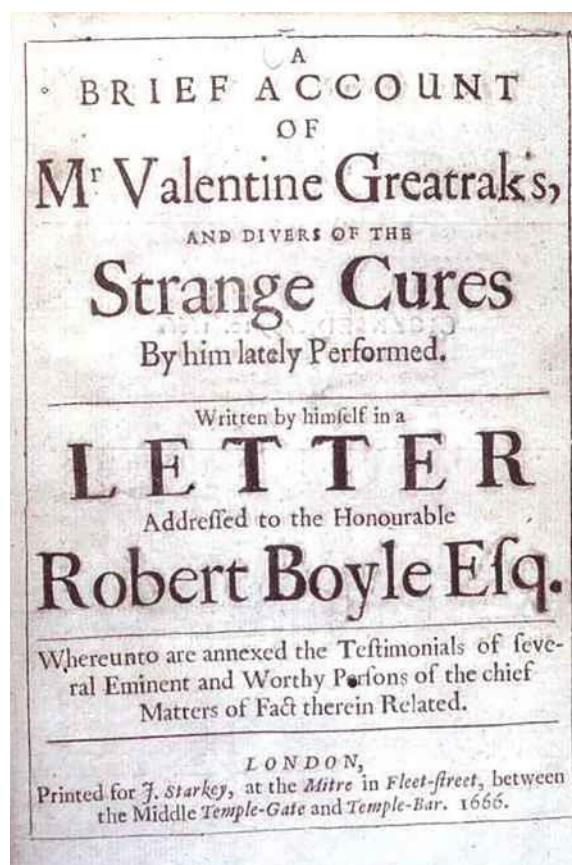
# Transportation by An Invisible Power: Part One

**BOB RICKARD** continues his survey of historical accounts of levitation and supernatural transportation by examining some early British and Irish cases. These bear interesting parallels to the famous abduction of Dr Moore by fairies in October 1678 and share many motifs, including the mediation of supernatural entities such as spirits, demons or fairies.

**D**uring the first two months of 1666,<sup>1</sup> there was an historic meeting of radical English and Anglo-Irish intellectuals at Ragley Hall, Warwickshire, the stately home of Lord and Lady Conway.<sup>2</sup> It was a private gathering of some of the most influential minds in Britain at that time – a mixture of polymaths, experimenters, philosophers, alchemists and physicians. They were all, in one way or another, associated with the newly established Royal Society, one of the world's earliest and most influential scientific institutions, discussing new ideas of theory and practice.<sup>3</sup>

They held in common a commitment to the burgeoning field of Natural Philosophy, which they hoped would unify two worldviews. One of these explored demonstrable phenomena and processes by which the new sciences (such as chemistry, medicine and physics) were purging themselves of superstition and ritual; the other investigated reports of magic, hauntings, possessions and witchcraft in the hope that tangible proofs could be found to refute the rising tide of atheism. The realists among them had a foot in both camps.<sup>4</sup>

However, this particular meeting was convened, not for a philosophical debate but to observe the celebrated Irish healer and mystic Valentine Greatrakes<sup>5</sup> attempt a cure of Lady Anne Conway's persistent migraines.<sup>6</sup> He was already treating Roger Boyle (Lord Orrery)<sup>7</sup> for gout and was asked to do the same for Edward, Lord Conway. The Conways' guests had already declared their "interest in unexplained healings" and they were eager to witness one. However, despite his numerous successes in healing, many witnessed by Boyle and his circle,<sup>8</sup> neither Greatrakes nor the conventional



**RIGHT:** Valentine Greatrakes was renowned for curing the sick by stroking them with his hands. In this oil painting, after an earlier engraving, he is shown stroking the left eye and head of a sick boy. **LEFT:** An account of Greatrakes's cures published in 1666.

in Youghal, Co. Cork, at the trial of Florence Newton for witchcraft,<sup>10</sup> he was a guest at Lord Orrery's Irish residence when he witnessed a man rise into the air and float about the room. He was only too happy to confirm this to the Ragley gathering, among whom was Dr Henry More,<sup>11</sup> head of the Cambridge Platonists. Later, when More edited Joseph Glanvill's *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681), he included Greatrakes's account under the title "An Irish story of one that had like to have been carried away by Spirits".<sup>12</sup> This was a significant moment in the history of science and supernaturalism in England because of the distinct influence *Sadducismus* had upon the debate between philosophers and demonologists that followed in England, in Colonial America and across Europe.

*He witnessed a man rise into the air and float about the room*

physicians could help Lady Conway.<sup>9</sup>

Unfazed, Greatrakes redeemed himself in another way. Not only had he been present

## AN INVISIBLE POWER

Tantalising hints of human levitation, flight and what we now term 'teleportation' are scattered throughout the voluminous literature of witchcraft, fairy lore, demonic possession and shamanism from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, but they usually remain just that, lacking important detail or documentation. However, the anthologies of accounts collected by Joseph Glanvill, Richard Baxter and Richard Bovet,<sup>13</sup> include a precious few cases with considerably more documentation than usual. While the quality and reliability of this support might not sway today's doughty





NATHANIEL  
GREATRAKES  
ANNO DOMINI

1664





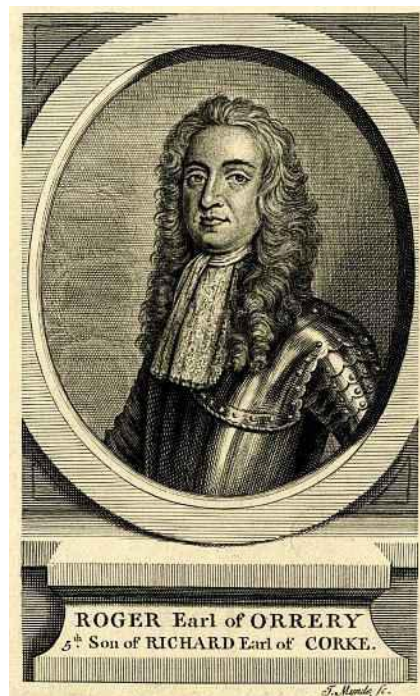
**ABOVE LEFT:** Castlemartyr today is home to a modern resort hotel built around the remains of the late 17th-century manor, with nothing left of the original Jacobean house except a few walls of the old Fitzgerald Castle. **ABOVE RIGHT:** *Perspective View with a Woman Reading a Letter* by Samuel van Hoogstraten. It has been suggested that the painting shows Anne, Viscountess Conway. **BELOW:** Roger Boyle, First Earl of Orrery.

‘skeptics’, I think it would be rash to dismiss the more critical level of observational detail and circumstantial evidence presented in these accounts.

In the late-1600s, Glanvill was seeking accounts for his *Sadducismus Triumphatus* and among his favoured topics was “*Transportation by an Invisible Power*.” Precisely why he settled upon this topic deserves more attention but, for now, suffice it to say that, in the context of the contemporary debate on the supernatural, he decided to “record them as Arguments for the confirmation of a Truth which hath indeed been attested by multitudes of the like Evidences in all places and times”. He was looking for proof that a “spirit... should transport the Witch through the Air to the place of general Rendezvous” and whether “that be true which great Philosophers affirm, concerning the real separability of the Soul from the Body without death”.<sup>14</sup> Glanvill’s correspondents on this topic included Robert Boyle<sup>15</sup> and John Aubrey.<sup>16</sup> Sometime in 1683, Aubrey received an account of the ‘Spreyton Demon’ (see part two, next issue) from his Somerset correspondent Andrew Paschal<sup>17</sup> for forwarding to Glanvill (who had died three years earlier). Paschal apologises for the delay, saying he “desired to have it attested” before sending it, “it being full of very memorable things”. Similarly, in 1694, a handful of case notes reached Aubrey from James Garden,<sup>18</sup> with an apology for this being too little and too late to be forwarded along the chain of letters to Glanvill.

What makes the story of Greatrakes and the butler seem so authentic is just how many circumstantial details are on record; something that folklorist Andrew Lang calls “a lucky accident”. Boyle had forwarded Glanvill’s inquiry to his elder brother, Lord Orrery, because, as Andrew Lang put it,

*The butler, it was said, had recently stumbled upon a group of fairies*



Boyle knew his brother “had enjoyed an experience not very familiar; he had seen a gentleman’s butler float in the air!” [19] The butler, it was said, had recently stumbled upon a group of fairies at their revels, and

began suffering “fits”. He had also survived an attempt to abduct him up into the air. Orrery, hoping to hear this astounding story from the man himself, offered the butler the sanctuary of his mansion at Castlemartyr, near Youghal.<sup>20</sup>

As things turned out, the butler had another levitation while in Orrery’s care, and the window for these events must have been between “the summer of 1660 and the spring or early summer of 1661”. Among the people set to watch him were Valentine Greatrakes, “two bishops” and “other Persons of Quality”. We have good reason to believe that Lord Orrery himself witnessed this second, indoor flight, which adds important credence to the story.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE BUTLER GETS A RISE

Details of the butler’s two aerial adventures have survived to our day, thanks to the remarkable archive of letters to and from both Conways<sup>22</sup> and the great curiosity of the Ragley Hall psychical researchers. We begin not in Ireland but at the Warwickshire home of the Conways, where the fullest version of events was heard from Greatrakes himself and recorded later by Joseph Glanvill and his colleagues.<sup>23</sup>

The butler in question was in the employ of “a Gentleman in Ireland near to the Earl of Ororie’s”<sup>24</sup>, so it was inevitable, given the Earl’s interests, that he would soon hear that the man was suffering fits after encountering a fairy host. Desiring to hear the man’s story directly, Lord Orrery “sent to the Master to desire him to send this Man to his House, which he accordingly did.” Upon arrival, the butler, considerably agitated by his fate, told the Earl that a friendly ghost had warned him that “that day, he should most certainly be carried away, and that no endeavours should avail to the saving of him.” Given that forewarning, Orrery ordered the man



should be “kept in a large room, with a considerable number of persons to guard him, among whom was the famous stroker Mr Greatrix, who was a neighbor.”<sup>25</sup> There were besides other Persons of Quality,” and also “two Bishops in the house at the same time,”<sup>26</sup>

Nothing happened until late afternoon, when, suddenly, the butler “was perceived to rise from the ground, whereupon Mr Greatrix and another lusty Man clapt their Arms over his shoulders, one of them before him, and the other behind, and weighed him down with all their strength. But he was forcibly taken up from them, and they were too weak to keep their hold, and for a considerable time he was carried in the Air to and fro over their heads, several of the Company still running under him to prevent his receiving hurt if he should fall.”<sup>27</sup> At length he fell and was caught before he came to ground, and had by that means no hurt.”

Most modern accounts stop there, as Andrew Lang reminds us. Time and again in the retelling of anomalous experiences from this period, we find original ‘supernatural’ elements being omitted, downplayed, and the traditional lore of ‘primitive’ folk dismissed as being embarrassing. This should not surprise us, as these narratives are being transmitted precisely at a time when rationality is distancing itself from superstition, and were written for a modern, materialist audience. Lang was particularly concerned that the account of the butler’s levitation retold by one of the most famous men of his day – Alfred Wallace (1823-1913), the anthropologist and ‘rival’ of Charles Darwin – “forgets to tell the world that the fairies, or good people, were, or were believed to be, the agents.”<sup>28</sup> Fairies were by no means the only agents of supernatural transportation; other stories lay the cause upon spirits of the dead, demons, witches, angels, and even God.

In the case of Dr Moore, who vanished dramatically while levitating, the event is explained entirely by referencing traditional fairy lore. Our butler’s story however, is triggered by a typical fairy encounter in the Gaelic tradition, but his entities are described as “spirits”, for the Puritans could not tolerate the existence of pagan elementals. This might seem a trivial point but it is a symptom of a subtle cultural eliding that deserves greater attention; it is also worth bearing in mind as we listen to the butler’s own account of his misfortune. Behind the Puritan tone of the narration, we discern, here and there, glimpses of the old Gaelic-Celtic culture. It is also significant that in the older, ‘primary’ forms of these tales, there are embedded clues that signal to the victims to whom they should go to intercede on their behalf for a cure or remedy – often the Wise Women, Fairy Doctors and traditional healers barely tolerated at the periphery of Christian society.

## THREE WITCHES CAME A-RIDING

The single biggest problem facing any researcher into our subject is that there is no single repository or research collection of such material. True, we have the *Acta Sanctorum*, fruit of the labour of the Bollandist monks, and a host of Christian writers, but these are parochial in that they concentrate chiefly upon their own approved holy folk, being theologically bound to shun accounts from all other sources as the outreach of ‘the Enemy’. The parallel cases from other religions and cultures, from spiritualism and shamanism, from demonology and fairylore have yet to be harvested. Probably most interesting of all, are the instances that, like some poltergeists, seem to occur spontaneously and independent of any religious or cultural context.

In many cases suggestive of levitation or teleportation – regardless of explanation – the details are regrettably minimal and the documentation fragmentary if it exists at all. Even in the sources I cite in this article, it is a very rare instance when the narrative provides more satisfactory details. An example of this lack is the tragic case of 70-year-old Julian Cox, of Taunton, Somersetshire – given as ‘Relation 8’ in Glanvill’s *Sadducismus* – which tantalises maddeningly. She freely confessed that, while out walking, “there came riding

towards her three persons upon three Broom-staves, born up above a yard and an half from the ground”. At the Summer Assizes, in 1663, she was accused of changing into a hare, making a pact with the Devil and suckling her toad familiars. A witness, a neighbour who knew her well, testified that she had seen Julian Cox “fly into her own Chamber Window in her full proportion”. It didn’t help that Julian muddled her recitation of the Lord’s Prayer and she was hanged within three days.

Another case that has us yearning for more details comes in a letter to Richard Bovet dated 25 June 1683, in which we learn that the four children (aged between 14 and eight) of Mr Meredith, in Bristol, have been “[hanging] about the walls, and Cieling of the Room, like Flies, or Spiders,” after suffering weeks of continuous “fits”. The writer surmises that a witch or her familiar “[has] lifted the patient by all four [word missing in original?] against the ceiling, or held them so against the side of a Wall, where they have seemed to hang in the air”. (Richard Bovet, *Pandæmonium, or, The Devil’s Cloyster*, 1684).

BELOW: Detail of the frontispiece to *Sadducismus Triumphatus*. The engraving by William Faithorne shows the Somerset witch Julian Cox “flying into her own chamber window”.







ABOVE: Detail of the frontispiece to *Sadducismus Triumphatus*. The engraving by William Faithorne shows the butler levitating at Lord Orrery's Irish home. Andrew Lang praises Faithorne's engraving for capturing "a picture of the company standing out, ready to field the butler, whose features display great concern".

### THE BUTLER'S STORY

Our source says that the butler had been sent by his master to buy some "playing cards" and this is later on denounced as a transgression akin to "Godlessness". Traditional fairies are not known to take much interest in human religious proscriptions; however, this would be wholly typical of contemporary Protestant moralising. By going on a godless errand, the butler had made himself a target for demonic forces. When he stumbles upon a group of fairies at their revels, they are seen with Gaelic-Irish eyes, but described with a Protestant-Irish tongue.

As his ride "passed a Field, he, to his

wonder, espied a company of people sitting round a Table, with a deal of good cheer before them in the midst of the Field. And he going up towards them, they all arose and saluted him, and desired him to sit down with them." Suddenly, he heard "one of them" whispering a warning into his ear: "Do nothing this company invites you to." And so, the butler refused to sit at the table with them. "Immediately Table and all that belonged to it were gone." They invited him to join in their music and dancing: again he refused. Finally, "they fall all to work." Once more, he refused to join them. Suddenly, "the Butler is alone." Instead of continuing his journey he returned home as fast as he

could "in a great consternation of mind". As soon as he entered his master's house "down he falls, and lay some time senseless". Later, "coming to himself again" he told his master what had frightened him.

The following night, the phantom comes to the butler's bedside. It's not clear if it is just a voice or an invisible spirit. The butler is told, firmly, that if he steps outside during the coming day, he is certain to be "carried away". He obeys, "but towards the Evening, having need to make water, he adventured to put one foot over the threshold," while several men stood guard. Almost immediately and strangely, "they espied a Rope cast about his middle, and



the poor Man was hurried away with great swiftness, they following after him as fast as they could, but could not overtake him.”<sup>29</sup>

During the chase, the men spotted a horseman approaching and called for him to stop the man coming towards him in mid-air. The rider could see the length of rope but no-one pulling at the upper end. It is not clear whether he saw the butler dangling on the lower end; nevertheless, he managed to grab the rope only to have the other end turn back on his arm with a “smart blow”. “But by this means,” the account continues, “the Man was stopt, and the Horseman brought him back with him.” As word of this strangeness spread, the butler was brought to Lord Orrery.

Orrery promptly ordered two of his servants to sleep in the same room as the butler. In the morning, the butler said the ghost came to his bedside once more; this time offering a “grey liquor” in a wooden bowl, telling him to drink it down. When the butler moved to awaken the servants, the spectre told him it would be useless. It advised him that he had nothing to fear; after all, said the ghost, if he hadn’t forewarned him that day, he would by now have been “perfectly in the power of the Company”. The phantom friend added that he was lucky not to have been “carried away the day before, there being so strong a Combination against him”. But now, the ghost continued, he could assure him that there would be “no more attempts of that nature”; instead he was afflicted with “two sorts of sad fits” and he [the spectre] had brought the medicine to cure him of them.

The perplexed butler was still suspicious and, when he refused, the spectre became angry and “disingenuous”, confessing that he had “a kindness for him”. The plantain root juice,<sup>30</sup> he promised, would cure one type of fit but “he should carry the other to his Grave”.

Finally, the phantom asked the butler if he knew who he was. When he replied “No”, the ghost revealed himself. The butler, in some disbelief, replied that that person “hath been long dead”. Yes, said the ghost, “I have been dead said seven years, and you know that I lived a loose life. And ever since have I been hurried up and down in a restless Condition with the Company you saw, and shall be to the Day of Judgment” as punishment for his Godlessness. Finally, the ghost admonished the butler, saying, “You never prayed to God that day before you met with this Company in the Field”, and you were also “going about an unlawful business.”<sup>31</sup> Job done, the spectre never came again.

## CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE

◆ **BOB RICKARD** started *Fortean Times* in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles on *forteana*.

## NOTES

**1** It is difficult to accurately or reliably date some of these events. For now, we can only say that the meetings at Ragley Hall occurred during the month following “27 January 1666”. Robert Crocker, *Henry More, 1614-1687: A Biography of the Cambridge Platonist*, (2003, Springer), p260, note 75.

**2** Ragley Hall was newly built by Royal Society founder Robert Hooke for Edward, 3<sup>rd</sup> Viscount Conway (c.1623–1683), and completed in 1680. Lord Conway was “a friend and political ally [of] Roger, Earl of Orrery” (1621–1679). Sarah Hutton, *Anne Conway: A woman Philosopher* (2004), pp124-125.

**3** For a more detailed picture of the main people, their interests and, importantly, their network of correspondents, see my article ‘Robert Boyle and the Invisible College’, **FT357:44-50**.

**4** It was the struggle between these two world views that determined the future direction of the Royal Society. Funding and political influence inevitably followed the more pragmatic path of scientific discovery and its practical social application.

**5** Greatrakes (1628–1683) – also known as ‘The Irish Stroker’ – was believed to effect healings from scrofula and other diseases by the ‘laying on of hands’, up to this time a prerogative of the monarch. He came from Anglo-Irish gentry in Youghal, Co. Cork, which had supported Cromwell in the Civil War, serving from 1649 in the regiment of Roger Boyle, then Lord Broghill. After the Restoration he retired to his estates at Affane, Co. Waterford. See Peter Elmer, *The Miraculous Conformist* (2013). Premonitions of his talent came to him first in 1662; see *A Brief Account of Mr. Valentine Greatrakes etc.*

by himself (1666), p22.

**6** Anne, Vicountess Conway (1631–1679), had suffered since her early teens, and her family had sought relief from many of the leading physicians of the age, including William Harvey (1578–1657), discoverer of the circulation of blood, and the mystical doctor and alchemist Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698). Lady Conway would have been remarkable in any age, having a sound grasp of philosophy and mysticism by her teens. She had no formal education but was later tutored by Henry More (1614–1687), who corresponded with her as an intellectual equal, and dedicated his *Antidote to Atheism* (1652) to her. See Carol Wayne White, *The Legacy of Anne Conway (1631–1679), Reverberations from a Mystical Naturalism* (2008) and Peter Elmer op.cit.

**7** Roger, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Orrery – aka Lord Broghill (between 1628–1660) – was a prominent Anglo-Irish soldier, Parliamentarian and playwright, later founding the town of Charleville, in Co. Cork. He and his younger brother Robert were sons of Richard Boyle, the Great Earl of Cork. After much debate, Orrery and others invited Greatrakes in July 1665, but the visit to Ragley Hall was delayed until January 1666.

**8** See Henry Stubbe (1632–1676), *The Miraculous Conformist* (1666) being an account to Robert Boyle of Greatrakes’s successes including endorsements by witnesses. He was yet another of the physicians consulted by the Conways.

**9** “While [Greatrakes’s] activities there did little for the viscountess’s headaches, the expedition did his career no harm. Viscountess Conway, herself a metaphysician and philosopher of note, had some influence

amongst the divines, philosophers and scientists who visited Ragley and they soon gathered at the house to view the healer.” Alan Marshall, ‘The Westminster Magistrate and the Irish Stroker: Sir Edmund Godfrey and Valentine Greatrakes, Some Unpublished Correspondence’, in *The Historical Journal*, vol 40, no.2 (June, 1997), pp499-505. The friendship between Greatrakes and Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey (1621–1678) – one of those who encouraged the Stroker to visit Ragley – will remind fortians of Charles Fort’s interest in the still unsolved murder of Sir Edmund, found dead in a ditch at Greenberry Hill, London (later renamed Primrose Hill) on 17 October 1678, which sparked fear of “a Popish plot”. Fort wrote of the curious coincidence: “the hanging of three men for the murder of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey on Greenberry Hill. The names of the murderers were Green, Berry and Hill.” Charles Fort, *Wild Talents* (1932), Ch.2 (FT edition, 1998), p5.

**10** The story of Florence Newton and the poltergeist-like phenomena that tormented her alleged victim, Mary Longdon, will be told in part two of this article.

**11** More also suffered from debilitating headaches which he and Lady Conway “delighted in comparing”. He also talked her out of travelling to Paris to undergo trepanning. Andrew Levy, *A Brain Wider Than the Sky: A Migraine Diary* (2009). Other notables visiting Ragley at this time and who likely heard Greatrakes tell his tale, include Bishop George Rust (c.1628–1670); Bishop Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667); philosopher Benjamin Whichcote (1609–1683); Whichcote’s theosophist sister, Elizabeth Foxcroft

Continued on page 50



(1600–1679) who was a live-in companion to Lady Conway at this time; Henry Stubbe; John Worthington (1618, d. 1671), a clergyman married to Elizabeth Foxcroft's niece; and philosopher Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688). These were all intelligent and curious minds and doubtless asked the kind of questions that would occur to any one of us, yet not one of them hinted that the story was a lie. Robert Crocker, *op.cit.*, p260, notes 72 and 75.

**12** Included as 'Relation 18' in Glanvill, *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681) pp246-250. There is an online transcription available at: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A42824.0001.001/1:19.18?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>. Glanvill's study of the occult was inspired by a belief that if the reports of witchcraft and the world of spirits were authentic then it should be subject to discoverable laws. Because he believed that scientific proof was inevitable, this book was written to refute atheists and disbelievers. Most of the stories in the book are anecdotal; some derived from the informal meetings at Ragley Castle, and others from his correspondents. His only personal experience with 'witchcraft', was during an encounter with an 'epileptic'.

**13** Joseph Glanvill (1636-1680), was for a while chaplain to King Charles II. Glanvill wrote the influential treatise *Philosophical considerations touching witches and witchcraft* in 1666, when he was rector of Abbey Church, Bath. This was revised, edited and expanded by Dr Henry More with additional accounts, and published under Glanvill's name, a year after his death (in 1680) as *Sadducismus Triumphatus*. Richard Baxter completed his collection, *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits ...* in 1671, a few months before his death, but it was not published until 1691. Available online at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A26888.0001.001>. For Richard Bovet, see note **33**.

**14** Glanvill, *op.cit.*, The Preface is unnumbered, but I quote from the ninth page and pp.13-14 of the adjacent 'Some Considerations about Witchcraft; in a letter to Robert Hunt, esq'. (Date unknown but possibly 1668).

**15** Robert Boyle (1627-1691), the Anglo-Irish natural philosopher balanced pioneering research in chemistry and physics with a devotion to the propagation of Christianity

(funding translations into Malay, Gaelic and Arabic). He was the younger brother of Roger, Lord Orrery, but declined offers of titles and never married. Significantly, he was one of the prime movers in establishing the Royal Society. His proto-scientific (and proto-fortean) curiosity knew few limits, investigating tales of witchcraft, second sight and the legendary weapon salve.

**16** John Aubrey (1626-1697), diarist and antiquarian, devoted his tempestuous life to collecting, legends, biographies, descriptions of regional topography, ancient monuments and customs. Hailed as one of England's finest prose writers by some, castigated for wasting time on gossip and unreferenced data by others, Aubrey's works are much valued now by fortuneans as well as historians.

**17** Despite being a frequent correspondent of Aubrey, we know very little of Paschal's life. He was a rector in the Somerset village of Chedzoy, who gathered stories for Aubrey from other clergymen in parishes around Barnstable.

**18** Dr Garden – Professor of Divinity in King's College, Aberdeen – was a valuable contributor to the Ragley group – via Aubrey – in that he “mobilised a network of contacts which spread from Aberdeen to Tod's Kirkwall schoolhouse, asking for information on everything from standing stones to second sight and from burial customs to scurvy cures.” Kelsey Jackson Williams, 'The Network of James Garden of Aberdeen and North-Eastern Scottish Culture in the Seventeenth Century', *Northern Studies*, 47, pp102-130. Garden's letter to Paschal was transcribed and forwarded to Aubrey, who published it in full under the heading 'Transportation by an Invisible Power', being chapter 14 in his *Miscellanies upon Various Subjects* (1696), frequently republished in successive editions. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A26190.0001.001>

**19** Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (1894), pp88-90

**20** Peter Costello noted that “this would place the Flying Butler just before the Witch of Youghal investigation (in Sept 1661; see part two) and Greatrakes' premonition, in 1662, that he could affect cures”. Peter Costello, correspondence December

2016. Peter is to be credited with this research, which is continuing to refine the date.

**21** This is given in footnote to 'Relation 18', editor Henry More's correspondent, “Mr E Fowler”, supplies an indirect confirmation of the event from Orrery himself: “an eminent Doctor in this City told me that My Lord told him, that he saw at his own house a Man taken up into the Air”. Glanvill, *op.cit.*, p250. Lang, *op.cit.* p90, adds that it was also the conclusion of Alfred Wallace (1823-1913), himself a Fellow of the Royal Society, who “adduces Lord Orrery and Greatrakes as witnesses of this event in private life.” See also Alfred Wallace, *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1875) p7.

**22** Marjorie Hope Nicolson ed., *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their Friends, 1642-1684* (1992). Revised edition with an introduction and new material edited by Sarah Hutton.

**23** The footnote also sheds some light upon the propagation of this remarkable account. (To sample the period flavour in these citations, I'll keep the original variation in spellings.) We learn that “This story was also sent from Mr. E. Fowler to Dr H[enry] More, concerning which he further adds by way of Postscript, that Mr Greatrix told this story to Mrs Foxcraft at Ragley, and at her request he told it a second time in her hearing at the Table. My Lady Roydon being then present, inquired afterwards concerning it of My Lord Orory, who confirmed the truth of it, acknowledging all the circumstances of this Narrative to My Lady Roydon to be true... I find Dr H More in a Letter to Mr Glanvil, affirming that he also heard Mr Greatrix tell the story at My Lord Conway's at Ragley, and that he particularly inquired of Mr Greatrix about the Mans being carried up into the Air above Mens heads in the room, and that he did expressly affirm that he was an Eye-witness thereof.”

**24** The account says that the butler arrived at the Orrery residence “the morning following, or quickly after” Orrery had sent for him, so it is reasonable to suppose that his master must have lived, probably in what was called “a big house”, within a day's ride of Castlemartyr.

**25** At this time, Orrery had moved from Castlemartyr to Charleville,” Peter Costello

writes, “leaving the Jacobean mansion in the hands of relatives. It would have been more convenient to Greatrakes, then living at Affane, to go to Castlemartyr, being only a few miles to the west of Youghal, on the main road to Cork city.”

**26** Lang, *op.cit.* p89, suggests that one of the bishops was Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667). Like Glanvill and Baxter, Taylor had once been a chaplain to Charles I, and was an active member of the Royal Society. He was also a friend of the Conways and John Aubrey.

**27** This scene is “almost certainly” (Peter Elmer *op.cit.*, p129) the one depicted at bottom left of the famous plate engraved for the expanded edition of *Sadducismus* (1681) by William Faithorne, the Elder (1616-1691). While Elmer is one of the few in print to directly locate the event “at the home of the Earl of Orrery”, he also calls it a case of “demonic levitation”.

**28** Lang, *op.cit.*, p90.

**29** At first, the mention of a rope seems like a rationalising of the way the butler was being pulled or lifted up. But this is soon incorporated into the narrative as the way to bring him back.

**30** The common plantain weed officially known as *Plantago major* or the narrow-leaved type *P. lanceolata*, has no known psychoactive components but is used in many cultures “to heal wounds, cure fever, and to draw out toxins from stings and bites”.

**31** As observed previously, the tale is presented in a traditional form but overlaid with or interpreted through the Puritan culture. Significantly, Irish Youghal was an enclave of English Protestants – and subject to English law regarding witches – in which fairies were not seen as pagan elementals but somehow spirits or otherwise associated with the dead or dark magic. The Puritan moral here is obviously punishment and atonement for blasphemers and sinners who break the Commandments.

**THANKS** to Dr Simon Young, Prof. Michael Hunter, Peter Costello and Roberto Labanti, all of who contributed in different ways to the evolution of this study.

# From Apple to Zeiss, and everything in between



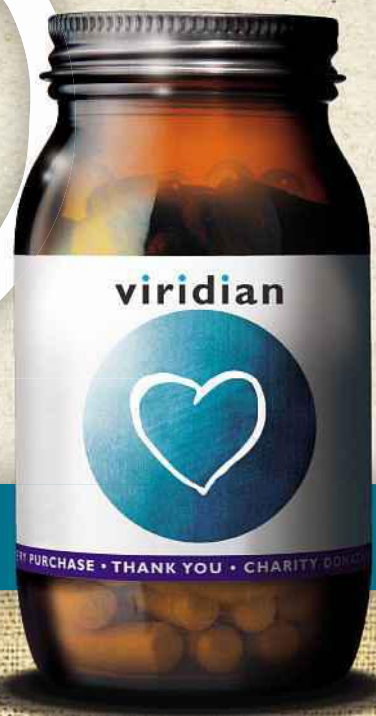
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## Terror of the 'flaming onions'

**NIGEL WATSON** buckles up and goes in search of a mysterious threat that struck fear into the heart of WWI fighter pilots

It is well known that any unusual aerial objects or balls of light seen by Allied pilots and air crew during World War II were generally described as 'Foo Fighters'. In contrast, little has been written about the very similar 'flaming onions' that haunted the pilots of World War I.

A personal account by 19-year-old Leslie Blacking, who was with the Royal Air Force 207 Squadron based at Ligescourt, northern France, in 1918, shows how vulnerable air crew felt when they saw them: "We had no armour-plating or parachutes, just fabric and wood around us and thin duck-boarding under our feet. Our greatest fear was fire in the air, if we were hit by any of the green 'flaming onions' or white phosphorus balls which arched up through the darkness from the ground defences."<sup>1</sup>

Denis Winter, in his book *The First of the Few: Fighter Pilots of The First World War*, agreed they were feared by pilots and explained that they were "fired from rocket guns to become green glowing balls which twisted about like live things and seemed to chase an aeroplane, turning over end on end in a leisurely way..."<sup>2</sup>

They seemed to be phosphorescent Napoleonic-type cannon balls linked by wire or chain, which could shred and incinerate aircraft on impact. For this reason, Arch Whitehouse, in his autobiography *The Fledgling: An Aerial Gunner in World War I*, called them "the most awesome projectile that had so far been devised by man".<sup>3</sup>

Not everyone regarded them with such awe and fear. According to Eric Dibbs, a former pilot with the No. 2 Squadron, Air Flying



LEFT: Pilots meet a fiery doom in *Biggles Learns to Fly*.

to an altitude of 5,000ft. Their rapid sequence of fire gave the impression that the flares were connected by a wire."<sup>5</sup>

Karl Kuster, a former Captain in the Imperial German Balloon Corps, confirmed that: "We had what we considered good protection around the balloons. Usually, the defences consisted of about six machine guns, and out of the old fortress we had a gun with a magazine similar to a revolver. It didn't shoot an exploding shell. It had a diameter of 1.5 inches

and although they seldom hit anything, when the enemy pilots saw them they were scared stiff. In those days airplanes flamed pretty easily and this ball of fire was nothing to fool around with. I have never heard of that expression of yours, 'flaming onions', but every balloon had one of these guns and it may be what the Allied pilots were referring to. Occasionally, of course, they would hit an attacking plane, but they were not considered to be too accurate... Later in the war they pulled more of these old guns out of the various fortresses, such as Verdun and Ulm, and others, and placed them around the balloons. But I always felt they were more of a morale-builder than anything."<sup>6</sup>

Even WE Johns, in the *Biggles* adventure story *Biggles Learns to Fly*, mentions flaming onions being the result of a German anti-aircraft device, and describes them as lines of pale green balls lazily floating upwards or as like white-hot cannon balls.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, some of the reports do not seem to match such weapons. There are accounts of a projectile that on reaching a certain altitude exploded with a loud cracking sound, followed

by a puff of white smoke that released a flaming ball, which cork-screwed horizontally in ever widening circles.<sup>8</sup>

This was such an unusual description of their characteristics, that historian Eric Watson could not "help wondering if the 'old-timers' who supplied... this information were, perhaps, indulging in a little good-natured leg pulling!"

The term 'flaming onions' provided a useful label for a terrifying anti-aircraft weapon or weapons, but as Eric Watson notes: "It is easy to imagine how, during the fever-pitch excitement of a balloon attack, some pilots could have visualised wires linking the fire-balls into a single chain, whether or not such things did, in fact, exist".<sup>9</sup>

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- 9 Watson, *ibid.*

◆ **NIGEL WATSON** is a veteran UFO researcher and author of UFOs of the First World War: Phantom Airships, Balloons, Aircraft and Other Mysterious Aerial Phenomena (2015).

*"We had no armour-plating, just fabric and wood around us"*

Corps: "We encountered 'flaming onions' quite frequently, but had no fear of them whatever. They came up relatively slowly and thus gave us plenty of time to take evasive action. They seemed to have a limited range of perhaps 5,000 or 6,000ft [1,500-1,800m]. In appearance, 'flaming onions' consisted of a string of white circular fire-balls, very close together and in a straight line. I don't recall ever seeing any green ones. When they reached their maximum height they simply died out and disappeared. There was no sign of any preliminary or terminal explosion."<sup>4</sup>

The mundane explanation is that the flaming onions were fired by German *Revolverkanonen* (revolving cannon) guns known as *Lichtspucker* (lightsplitter) guns. These were like a Gatling gun that had five rotating barrels that could fire a string of flares



## The many faces of Mephistopheles

**STEVE TOASE** drops in to Munich's Faust Festival to observe the evolution of Goethe's tempter from Francophobe poodle to demonic Nazi...

A casual observer might find the jaunty black poodle motif adorning posters for the Munich Faust Festival somewhat unusual. Yet this unthreatening cartoon dog is integral to Goethe's masterpiece as the form in which Mephistopheles follows the eponymous hero home. (Although promotional materials for the 2018 festival portray the stereotypical toy poodle, Faust probably had in mind a medium to large sheepdog.) As well as the folkloric link (black hounds have a long association with the demonic e.g. Black Shuck and the Barghest), there may be other reasons why Goethe chose a canine form for Mephistopheles's first manifestation.

In *Man Writes Dog: Canine Themes in Literature, Law and Folklore*<sup>1</sup> William Farina goes into some depth about Goethe and dogs, pointing out that the inspiration came from an anonymous chapbook where Faust is accompanied by an evil magical dog. Farina also explores Goethe's dislike for canines, highlighting several incidents that might have shaped his animosity. In the semi-autobiographical novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Goethe describes a play "interrupted by the unruly dogs of irresponsible pet owners". A second incident happened while Goethe travelled with his patron, Duke Karl August. Stopping in Göttingen they were kept awake by street dogs barking. This disturbance was dealt with by throwing bags at the pack of noisy hounds.

Farina argues that a third event might have been the one



*He was shown dressed in red with a feathered hat*

that ultimately determined the appearance of Mephistopheles. During his time supervising the ducal theatre, Goethe resisted putting on the popular melodrama *The Dog of Aubry*, which featured a live performing poodle. Caroline Heygendorf-Jagemann, the principal actress, went over Goethe's head to get the approval of Karl August. Goethe left town and was relieved of his managerial duties.

Geopolitics may also have influenced his choice. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany was affected by France's expansionist ambitions, and the poodle's link to France may well have driven Goethe's choice of dog. The passage gave rise to the German *Das war also des Pudels Kern*, or "that is the core of the poodle", the phrase Faust uses when Mephistopheles transforms from a dog.

The poodle doesn't often appear in later performances of Faust, and maybe for that reason Mephistopheles is most



familiar as the wandering scholar. After several moments of shapeshifting, Mephistopheles settles on his chosen form, describing himself:

*"Bin ich als edler Junker hier, In rotem, goldverbrämtem Kleide, Das Mäntelchen von starrer Seide, Die Hahnenfeder auf dem Hut..."*

*"Here, as a youth of high degree, I come in gold-lac'd scarlet vest, And stiff-silk mantle richly dress'd, A cock's feather in the hat..."*

LEFT: The poster for the Munich Faust Festival, complete with a Mephistophelian poodle. BELOW: Sir Henry Irving as Mephistopheles.

Since the time Goethe wrote *Faust Part One*, Mephistopheles has most often been portrayed wearing scarlet, for example in Gustav Heinrich Naeye's 1811 painting *Faust and Gretchen* (believed to be the first painting of Goethe's Faust), where he can clearly be seen in the background with distinctive scarlet clothing, and hat trimmed with a single cock's feather. Similarly, in Alexandre-Marie Colin's 1825 portrayal of *The Death of Valentin*, a key scene from *Faust Part One*, Mephistopheles is behind Faust, a black feather rising up from his red cap. In Theodore von Holst's *Fantasie nach Goethe* (1834) Mephistopheles is again shown red capped (though this time it's a jester's hat bedecked in bells) with his distinctive feather.

This form can also be seen in sculpture, such as Jacques-Louis Gautier's 1852 bronze, *Mephisto*, where the thin, twisting demon is again shown wearing his feather trimmed hat.

Although Goethe himself argued that *Faust* in its entirety was impossible to stage (though German director Peter Stein did arrange the 21-hour epic in 2000), it is through theatrical performances that most people are familiar with Goethe's Mephistopheles. *Faust, Part One* was first produced in Brunswick, Germany, in 1829 (where Mephistopheles was played by Heinrich Marr), and next in Weimar later that year to honour Goethe's birthday, though he himself never saw a performance.

Portrayals of Mephistopheles on the boards continued the tradition of showing him as a travelling scholar, dressed in red with a feathered hat, as, for example, in Sir Henry Irving's assumption of the role, immortalised in a hand-coloured



card from 1885.

When *Faust* made the transition from page to stage, Mephistopheles also changed. His outfit often involved a close-fitting red hood, as can be seen from Henry Irving's costume; this maintained the traditional look of the travelling scholar, but gave a more 'demonic' appearance. This close-fitting head covering is evident in the 1895 oil painting *Mephisto* by Eduard Von Grützner. A second change to Mephistopheles's costume took him further toward the traditional appearance of a devil: sometime in the late 19th century, Mephisto's feather bifurcated. It is hard to pinpoint exactly when one feather became two, yet it is clear from the bill for the premiere of Charles Gounod's opera *Faust* at Paris's Théâtre Lyrique in 1859 that Mephisto's hat decoration is already splitting. In promotional shots for Gounod's opera at New York's Metropolitan Opera House, Franco Novara (born in Wiltshire as W Francis Naish) is shown in two costumes, first with a single feather, in the second with two curling feathers.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century portrayals of Mephistopheles with double feathers are far more common. Most of these are linked to Gounod's opera, for example the 1895 painting *Curtain Call* by Thure de Thulstrup, in some 1892 collectible cards made by the Liebig Company, and in an 1869 illustration of Faure as Mephistopheles. Mephisto was also sculpted by Pierre-Eugene-Emile Hebert and shown in the stage premiere of a *Faust* variant called *The Devil's Seven Castles*. While it's difficult to pin down who is responsible for this change, the addition of a second feather was certainly responsible for influencing the character's diabolic appearance.

Another place in which the double-feathered, demonic Mephistopheles appeared was at the Belle Époque club 'Le Cabaret de L'Enfer' in Paris. Despite the possible Francophobe influences on *Faust*, France had a long love affair with Goethe's epic work. (In 1831 Paganini made his Paris



**TOP LEFT:** The double-feathered Mephistopheles of the Cabaret de L'Enfer. **TOP RIGHT:** A demonic rendering by Eduard Von Grützner. **ABOVE:** Gründgens's 1960 film portrayal fed into Brandauer's performance in the 1981 film *Mephisto*.

Opera debut. Joseph D'Ortigue exclaimed "Yes it's him, it's Mephistopheles... I saw him and heard him play the violin."<sup>2</sup> The Cabaret de L'Enfer took things further than any staging of *Faust*. Situated in the Pigalle district, the hell-themed cabaret was an exercise in excess. Walking through a demon's mouth, visitors were greeted with smoldering fires and jets of flame. This was a place of spectacle, with red imps serving

drinks or turning somersaults, yet at the cabaret's heart was Goethe's play. American author WM Morrow wrote of "half a dozen devil musicians... playing a selection from *Faust* on stringed instruments",<sup>3</sup> and in the middle of it all was Mephistopheles (portrayed in existing photos by Antonin Alexander), still a wandering scholar, in his red outfit with two feathers rising from his cap like horns.

As Goethe's *Faust* moved into the 20th century, portrayals of Mephisto moved away from the last century's ambiguity to a more explicitly demonic form. For German audiences, one man represented Faust's tempter in the popular imagination: Gustaf Gründgens. Estimated to have portrayed Mephistopheles between 350 and 600 times, Gründgens was a controversial figure, due in no small part to his closeness to the Third Reich regime in the 1930s. His portrayal, with thick panstick and defined eyebrows (an appearance that changed little between 1932 and the filmed version of *Faust* in 1960) was so iconic that when Klaus Mann's *Mephisto: Novel of a Career*<sup>4</sup> was turned into a film in 1981, Klaus Maria Brandauer's portrayal of Hendrik Höfgen in thick white panstick removed any ambiguity about its thinly disguised subject.

In recent years, Mephistopheles has been portrayed on stage as a scampering maniac, a woman, and a suited businessman. Yet, there is still something powerful about the twin images of black poodle and scarlet-clad scholar – they suggest that the Devil might not always appear accompanied by clouds of fire and brimstone with horns proudly displayed, but sometimes with the stench of stage makeup, scorched paw prints, or curling twin feathers...

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THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

# BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## 32. NO GODDAMN' CAT, NO GODDAMN' CRADLE

We draw our title from Kurt Vonnegut, whose protagonist in his classic *Cat's Cradle* was eternally incensed at the lack of cradle and absence of cat in the children's trick, deficiencies that coloured his whole outlook upon life. You may feel the same way after reading our selected book here – or even this entry, since it's full of plot spoilers – though we could wish for a kinder fate. On the other hand, you may feel a certain glow of satisfaction at discovering how rumour colours memory and combines with cultural conceptions to produce a legend. After all, is not *fortean* an accumulation of legends? And might not the dissection of one legend (replete, as it happens, with the most upright and unimpeachable eye-witnesses) shed some light on the nature of other *fortean* staples and why we nurse them even without wholly embracing them?

Peter Lamont's point of entry into the cat's-cradle world of the Indian Rope Trick is Max Weber's notion that the rise of Enlightenment rationalism and science made a magical, or enchanted, world view no longer tenable. It is arguable that Weber's 'disenchantment' was largely the property of the respectable Victorian middle classes rather than of the Great Unwashed, but its adoption as the only adequate account of the way things are is demonstrable from the history of education alone, and to upright rationalists was demonstrated emphatically by the extraordinary successes of Victorian science, industry, and engineering. Most of which was British, although the occasional Eiffel tower, Minot's Ledge lighthouse and Panama Canal had to be conceded to Johnny Foreigner. All of which proved to minds of such a cast that British imperialism was a Good Thing, bringing progress of various kinds to backward peoples. The narrow presumption of cultural superiority easily slid into a yet narrower presumption of racial superiority.

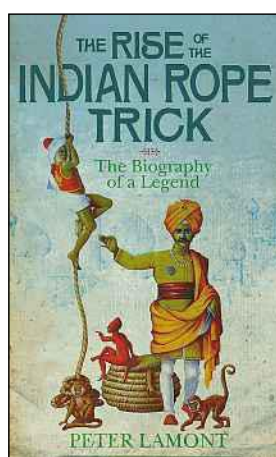
So, when word of the Indian Rope Trick got about in the 1890s, Western magicians (*viz.* stage conjurers) were incensed on two grounds. First, it was unacceptable that Indian 'jugglers', as Indian magicians were always known, could outwit their Western counterparts by producing a trick that no one could figure out how

to reproduce precisely; and second, the fallback – that the Indians were using some occult or paranormal means to astonish their audiences – was, if anything, even less acceptable to staunchly rational Western illusionists. After all, India was the jewel in Victoria's imperial crown: it was *ours*, and such things were all-but illegal within the Empire. At the same time, the Rope Trick appealed enormously to the Western imagination, and not just that of the Great

Unwashed. While officially logical and 'scientific', European sensibilities still hankered for wonder and mystery, and found it not surprisingly in the distant, unseen Inscrutable Orient, *alias* the Mysterious East. At home, both nobility and commoners had to be content with manifestations in séance rooms, psychical research, ghost stories, the ramblings of Madame Blavatsky, and other absurdities that exposed the fragility of the disenchanted world. A spot of *real* magic emanating

from 'our' India was entirely acceptable, maybe even patriotic, and eagerly embraced.

Magicians had a double-pronged strategy to deal with the conundrum. First, to find reliable witnesses to the Trick, to establish its *bona fides*. Next, to discover how the Trick was done, and reproduce it on the London, Paris or New York stage. And these two achievements would demonstrate the ascendancy of



the Western mind or, to be crude about it, keep the natives in their place. Part of the problem however was that as time went by, the Trick changed, according to accounts received. In essence, the earliest version is as follows. A juggler throws a rope into the air, so high that the end sails out of sight. Then a small boy climbs the now-rigid rope, and he too vanishes. The rope falls to the ground. No sign of the boy, but he suddenly reappears on the ground. Much applause, &c. By the 1930s the Trick had elaborated, due to various confusions and fruitless, frantic hunts for its allegedly ancient origins. In the evolved version: once the boy is out of sight, the juggler grabs a scimitar and follows him up the rope, also to disappear. Shortly thereafter, the limbs, head and trunk of the wee lad bounce on the ground, to gasps of horror, collapse of stout party, &c. The magician reappears, whether out of thin air upon the ground or by shimmying down; the body parts are thrown in a basket, which is closed and then re-opened, whereupon the boy, now happy, smiling, and reassembled, skips out and about. Stout party is presumably resurrected. Accounts seem to be silent about what happens to the rope; at any rate Dr Lamont doesn't tell us.

In the four decades and more after the Trick was first described in the West, numerous hardy souls had travelled to India and well beyond in the hope of seeing such a performance. Not only did they fail uniformly in this; they could find no one who had even heard of the Trick, least of all jugglers and fakirs, until the 1930s. This despite various rewards being offered locally for information about the Trick – although people who'd been out East (and seen a thing or two) drily pointed out that the average *sadhu*, fakir or juggler didn't read the *Times of India*, or perhaps even read at all. At least one of these legendary rewards – an astonishing £10,000 – had never been offered. This was allegedly put up in 1875 to secure a performance for the visiting Prince of Wales, whose Progress to India cost £60,000, but no mention of this reward is to be found in the royal accounts or the Viceroy's official diary. This may be explained by the Trick's being unknown in Britain until the 1890s.

Those most interested in squashing the heresy of super-smart, or occult, Indian jugglery, the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and the Magic Circle, were faced with further exasperations. The latter did put up a 500-guinea reward for anyone who could perform the Trick, only to be met by such persons as “His Excellency Dr Sir Alexander Cannon, KCGB, MD, D.Sc, Ph.D, D.Litt., DPM, MA [twice] ... FRSA, FRSM, FRGS, FACP, FRSTM...”, who said he lived in the fourth dimension, and would require not 500 guineas but £50,000 to fill the Royal Albert Hall with “a shipload of sand” and to heat that mighty chamber to tropical temperature; he would also supply an appropriate yogi for the performance. Strangely, the Occult Committee of the Magic Circle did no more than thank Dr Cannon for his attendance. Various stage magicians – Dr Lamont provides many brilliant cameo portraits of them – created various feeble versions of the Trick, but still no one could do it in the open air. Possibly more vexing was the emergence over the years of people who claimed to have seen the Trick themselves, and yet more who had had an account of it from a friend or a friend of a friend. These stories tended to fall apart upon interrogation, although that didn’t silence the ‘eyewitnesses’ (it never does).

At various points, photographs of the Trick being performed were published, and these were either admitted, or duly revealed, to be hoaxes or, more accurately, faked. And sundry implausible ‘revelations’ as to how the Trick was performed were trundled out from time to time. A favourite went thus: two stalwarts of the military or the professions saw the Trick performed, and one of them took photographs at each stage. When the photographs were developed, they showed nothing more than the juggler basking in the sun. Yet both men had seen it all. How could this be? Mass hypnosis, was the popular answer. While all expert opinion pronounced this to be impossible, the ‘explanation’ was still doing the rounds in print decades later and stuck in the folk memory until the 1950s at least. Christian missionaries denounced the Trick as the work of the Devil, which at best was only half an explanation. Others, less concerned with hellfire, suggested the ‘rope’ was actually a jointed bamboo pole, carefully unfolded as the infant ascended. Another suggested that it was rams’ vertebrae covered with sailing cord: twist it, and the bones would lock together. Then there were the smoke-but-no-mirrors accounts, which had the juggler misdirect the audience by setting an end of the rope on fire and thrusting it into his mouth, while assistants in nearby houses hauled the other end (attached to a ‘slender



“IF THERE’S A  
BOOK THAT YOU  
WANT TO READ,  
BUT IT HASN’T  
BEEN WRITTEN  
YET, THEN YOU  
MUST WRITE IT.”

*Toni Morrison*

line’) into the sky; the whole obscured by yet more smoke. And then: “Amid much noise, and a great deal of smoke, a second heavy rope is lowered and attached with a metal catch to the first rope, which is hauled up, along with the wailing fakir, by his assistants on top of the nearby roof.” As Dr Lamont remarks, this elucidation proceeded from “an imagination unrestricted by any practical knowledge of conjuring”. Another smoky account had the braziers “burning mysterious compounds”, and these “cunning preparations” might contain “brain-stealers”, from which it may be inferred a version of the mass-hypnosis explanation was, so to speak, clouding the air.

None other than John Keel claimed to have been given the secret of the Trick in

1955, by an old man whom he met on the top of a hill, and whose name was Vadaramakrishna. Instead of thin ropes operated by assistants on the top of buildings, this version had thin ropes crisscrossing a valley and anchored on the tops of nearby hills. The performance was always held at dusk, with lanterns on the ground, thus obscuring what happened at the top of the rope. The boy’s dismembered parts (for this was the full-blown Trick) were those of a previously-butchered large monkey. The boy hid in the juggler’s baggy clothes for the return journey to the ground and was there presented miraculously alive and in rude health. How the monkey parts were hidden or disposed of, we’re not told. Keel was rash enough to try to demonstrate the method, although sans monkey and boy, in front of some 50 journalists, but honest and self-deprecating enough to describe how a monsoon arrived to turn his show into an utter shambles. So it goes, as Vonnegut would have said.

After all these failures, faked photos, and phoney stories, where, we may ask, did the Indian Rope Trick come from? Was it ever in fact performed? Similar kinds of

trick have been reported down the ages, and some of these accounts may well have informed the original description – which appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in August 1890, written uncredited by one John E Wilkie, who later, as it happens, became the head of the US Secret Service. The tale, which credited the Trick to mass hypnosis, spread across America and throughout Europe, and apparently stirred some controversy, for eventually a professor and advocate of the hypnotic tendency demanded that the *Tribune* provide “an assurance of the truth”. The paper was obliged to admit the story was a hoax, printing the retraction in December 1890. Shortly thereafter the editor of the *People’s Friend*, Andrew Stewart, had a signed confession from Wilkie. But by then the legend had legs of its own, and kept on running, and growing new legs too. Wilkie’s name was forgotten in all the excitement, along with the *Tribune*’s withdrawal of the story.

And so it goes, too, with legends. Dr Lamont’s book is an object lesson in discerning how such fables arise and grow and refuse to die. It is also full of sly humour, and nuggets of curious information, such as who invented the penny-in-a-slot lock for public lavatories. No fortean library should be without it.

Peter Lamont, *The Rise of the Indian Rope Trick: A Biography of a Legend*, Little, Brown, 2004.



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## A near-forgotten cannibal occultist

The scratchy and slightly cartoonish style of Ollman's graphic biography of William Seabrook is surprisingly well suited to the now-obscure travel writer, sadist and designer of bondage gear

### The Abominable Mr Seabrook

Joe Ollmann

Drawn & Quarterly 2017

Pb, 316 pp, illus, bib, ind, £15.90, ISBN 9781770462670

If the Lost Generation-era journalist, travel writer, occultist, cannibal and sadist William Seabrook hadn't existed, we'd have had to invent him. Joe Ollmann – author of the UFO-themed graphic novel *Science Fiction* (2013) – encountered Seabrook's eccentric oeuvre over a decade ago, but it is frustratingly unavailable, apart from a few reprints including *The Magic Island*, which introduced the zombie into popular culture, and *Asylum*, a memoir of his attempt to overcome alcoholism. Ollmann felt “sort of obligated” to tell Seabrook's life story and in the graphic biography *The Abominable Mr Seabrook*, he has produced a portrait that is entertaining, nuanced and tragic.

Seabrook was gassed at the Battle of Verdun in 1916 while in the American Ambulance Field Service of the French Army, for which he was awarded the Croix de Guerre. *Diary of Section VII*, privately printed in 1917, is a memoir of those experiences. That year, Seabrook joined the *New York Times* as a reporter, but soon transitioned to travel writing. In 1924, his travels took him to Arabia, where he was welcomed as family by a Bedouin tribe and the Kurdish Yazidi. On the strength of *Adventures in Arabia* (1927), he travelled to Haiti, where he became immersed in the Cult of Death and ‘voodoo’ culture, shockingly described in *The Magic Island* (1929). Encouraged by its positive reception, Seabrook undertook a well-funded trip (described in *Jungle Ways*,

1930) to West Africa, where he claimed he ate human flesh with a cannibal tribe. He later admitted that he had not been allowed to join in the ritual; instead, he purchased human flesh from a hospital, then cooked and ate it. Seabrook's somewhat perfunctory exposé of ritualistic occultism, *Witchcraft: Its Power in the World Today* (1940), in which he proclaimed that none of his experiences were without rational scientific explanation, was not published until a decade later. He includes an account of Aleister Crowley's visit to his upstate New York farm. They conducted a week-long experiment wherein their communication was limited to a single word: “wow”. Seabrook adopted similar verbal restrictions during his later ritualistic, sadomasochistic, parapsychological ‘research’.

Seabrook's 1930s output – *Air Adventure* (1933) and a study of a defrocked monk in the French Sudan (*The White Monk of Timbuctoo*, 1934) – was less impressive. His alcoholism worsened and in late 1933, he committed himself to a mental institution for six months. *Asylum* (1935), which achieved critical and commercial success, should have marked a career revival, yet, aside from his last work, the cathartic autobiography *No Hiding Place* (1942), *Asylum* remains a noteworthy outlier.

While Ollmann provides insightful literary criticism of and biographical context for Seabrook's work, it is his life and not his writing that receives primary attention, in particular his sadism. “The key to a locked man is his supreme want”, Ollmann quotes Seabrook as saying. Seabrook's supreme want

*“He travelled to Haiti, where he became immersed in the Cult of Death and voodoo”*

involved women in chains, an obsession he traced back to an almost hallucinatory childhood memory of being led by his laudanum-addicted grandmother to an imaginary ruined castle in which a young woman was chained to a throne. Seabrook married three times, but his fetish strained his first two marriages to breaking point. His appetite for bondage and sadism, if *The Strange World of Willie Seabrook* (1966) by second wife Marjorie Muir Worthington is to be believed, was epic. He hired young women, whom he bound and gagged, and designed his own bondage gear; Man Ray photographed him with a restraint around the neck of photographer Lee Miller. Seabrook married a final time in 1942 and divorced the same year. He committed suicide by drug overdose in 1945.

Ollmann's intention was to allow as little editorial interference as possible, and yet it is perhaps unavoidable. He depicts Seabrook's escapades – be they foreign travel or S&M – in the same scratchy, cartoony style (best described as a marriage between Edward Gorey and Eddie Campbell) that underlines Seabrook's tawdriness and desperation. Moreover, his nine-panel per page visual structure seems a neat counterpoint to the messiness of Seabrook's life.

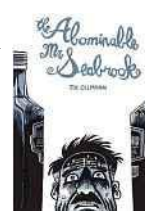
After all, Seabrook is, on the surface, unlikable, a difficult subject for a biography, and yet it is this depravity and weakness of character that arguably prove to be Seabrook's most fascinating traits.

Ollmann's portrait is surprisingly sympathetic, convincingly arguing that, despite Seabrook's many failings, he was not altogether unredeemable. He was a sexual deviant and self-destructive, yet also talented and quite charming. He could churn out hack work yet also produce, whatever its veracity, disarmingly honest, insightful and heartbreaking autobiography. As a result of his late-stage alcoholism, Seabrook was unable to repeat earlier successes and failed to keep up with changing literary tastes. His downfall, Ollmann argues, was his failure ever to recognise the possibility for renewal or redemption. In Ollmann, Seabrook has found that most enviable of posthumous advocates: the sincerely engaged, yet humane biographer.

The medium of graphic biographies has exploded in recent years; just three decades ago, there were only a handful of practitioners (Jack Jackson and Art Spiegelman to name two) using this promising format. Ollmann, who primarily writes fictional comics that read like autobiography, is a Johnny-come-lately to graphic biography, yet with *The Abominable Mr Seabrook*, he has produced one of the form's more memorable recent entries. It easily takes its place among the best the medium has to offer.

Eric Hoffman

★★★★★





# It is a *fa, fa* better thing...

A comparative cosmologist's take on the links between the Dogon, ancient Egyptian and Faroese languages somehow fails to convince

## The mystery of Skara Brae

Neolithic Scotland and the Origins of Ancient Egypt

Laird Scranton

Inner Traditions 2017

Pb, 198pp, illus, £11.99, ISBN 9781620555736

The Orkney Islands are possibly the finest area for prehistoric archaeology in Scotland (aka S-khet-land), perhaps even in the British Isles, and are rivalled only by the Isle of Arran (or ex-Alba), by the Boyne Valley and, of course, by Stonehenge–Avebury (Wessex).

The stone-built Neolithic settlement of Skara Brae ('Faro' in Dogon) is one of the chief sites, along with Maes Howe, the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness. (The latter two are a short distance apart, rather than the five miles indicated by Scranton.) The last decade has added the spectacular finds at the Ness of Brodgar, and all are constituents of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site. As an aside, the Stones of Stenness are fabled in song as sung by *Play Away*'s own white witch Toni Arthur on 'Harken to the Witches Rune'.

But to this author this is but slight reason for fame. For the area was to the Greeks the Elysian Fields and for the Egyptians the blessed farms of the dead, and the builders of these monuments the universal teachers of ancient wisdom, instructing in the universal (probably meaning global but perhaps universal) language.

Laird Scranton is a Dogon-obsessed, self-described cosmologist, or rather a "comparative cosmologist, it's a bit like being a police inspector". Despite some early knotted sentences on string theory and a hesitant wave

to quantum mechanics (ideas seemingly well known to the Dogon priesthood) this is not the cosmology of Carl Sagan or Stephen Hawking, but closer to the crystal balls area of scholarship.

Like mainstream cosmologists, Scranton is seeking the one simple, elegant unification principle linking the very small and the truly huge. However, unlike physicists, he has found it and it resides in Africa. Or perhaps the windswept North Atlantic, but probably Africa...

This is the work of scholarship that the Rev Casaubon would have understood and admired;



indeed his unfinished masterwork 'Key to all Mythologies' would seem an apposite template for this slightly less ambitious work.

Selecting a Dogon-French dictionary, a very discredited, high Victorian/Edwardian hieroglyphic-English dictionary and a computer generated Faroese-English thesaurus, he takes the very small monosyllabic, guttural noises *nu, ma, aar, seh* etc, and by selective, but unsound, manipulative searches, finds enough matches to light up the origins of mankind's panglobal creation myths.

A typical (and one of the 'better') examples is *fa* (a note to follow 'so?'). It occurs in *faro* (Dogon for 'chief') in pharaoh and in Faroese but (it now becomes stickier) also in the Faroese word for the regal bird falcon (Egypt again, Horus) and in ever more tortuous sound bites rippling out into wider concepts like 'to teach'.

He can be forgiven for excluding Faro in Portugal but why overlook the more obvious Pharos of Alexandria – a ray of light, lots of broad-beamed concepts there to misapply. It matters not that Dogon is

an 'ancient' language, that there is uncertainty over the correct sounds in pre-Dynastic 'Egyptian' or that Faroese is a language that could not have evolved much before the settling of the islands in the 9th century AD. His pitch is that *fa* is a universal (so ultra-conserved) sound/concept and so is no mean element in the scale of things.

It is a tonic to find that at least there is no numerology, and the Pyramids and Stonehenge are given only glancing blows, the starry heavens barely glimpsed. But it is linguistic number-crunching of the sloppiest kind and from secondary sources. He searches for cosmological old-retained ('ultra-conserved') words in much the same way that Proto-Indo-European researchers do, but with fewer languages and with *fa* [sic] greater certainty.

Oh, why Faroese? Well, Faroe is 'close' to the Orkneys (300km/186 miles away. This book should not be read as a travel guide) and was used by the Orkney sages as a retreat/holiday camp. But better: there is a pyramid-like structure on one of the islands leading Scranton's friend Andy Monk to ask if the ancient Egyptians were involved in building there. Perhaps there will not be a long wait before Mr Monk's new speculations inspire more Dogon revelations – there are isolated islands, dictionaries and lost pyramids aplenty.

The book is full of torturous word play even to the last sentence, when he is reminded that *s-khet* is the Egyptian term for the Dogon cosmological egg and asks "Given that, does it not seem reasonable that they would have conceived the Orkney region as S-khet-land". No... but certainly it is time for *mi ti*, (scrambled eggs) that brings us back to 'Doh!'.

Rob Ixer

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## The Sorcerer's Apprentice

Ed: Jack Zipes; illus Natalie Frank)

Princeton University Press 2017

Hb, 480pp, illus, bios, bib, ind, list of tales, ISBN 9780691172651

Jack Zipes is no newcomer to fairytales, and brings insight, experience and nuance to the subject. Having covered subjects such as Little Red Riding Hood, the Brothers Grimm and Mary Poppins, he now turns his attention to the Sorcerer's Apprentice.

The book is divided up into four sections, starting with Zipes's introduction 'Why Magic Matters', followed by collections of humiliated apprentice tales, rebellious apprentice tales, and Krabat tales. As well as exploring the differences between them, he thoroughly explores their nature. This is particularly relevant to forteans when he outlines the idea of the memplex; how "one basic text or tale type becomes stable and more fit to survive under all social and cultural conditions than other memetic tales as it is adapted or adapts itself through diverse modalities. In the process it spawns variant memes that surround the stable type to form a memplex."

This idea of a memplex in the way stories are transmitted and are carried forward is well argued and supported through examples.

Zipes also puts forward a good argument for Childism in these story types, which Young-Bruehl describes as "a belief system that constructs its target group, 'the child', as an immature being produced and owned by adults who use it to serve their own needs and fantasies."

Zipes identifies this theme running through the different types of sorcerer's apprentice story, in the way the apprentice is traded into service, and then is sold to raise money for the family. This is an informative take on the story type, particularly looking at how the Disney version has an unquestioning acceptance and the implications that has for the abusive treatment of children around the globe.

So what of the stories themselves? Zipes divides them into three types, tracing each back as far as possible. As the



stories come chronologically closer to our time, there seems to be a flattening out in the variation, but it never feels like Zipes's editorial voice is overwhelming the individual character of the story.

The final section explores the Krabat stories, a particular cycle of tales in the Sorbian and German tradition of folk tales coming out of Lusatia. They are heavily tied to ideas of resistance and local identity, and form a very discrete group with shared characteristics such as the Satanic mill, use of oats to conjure soldiers, and the damage to a church steeple (normally in Kamenz).

*The Sorcerer's Apprentice* is a nuanced and fascinating exploration of a group of stories that might at first glance seem familiar.

Zipes succeeds in bringing out a lot more detail. The implications of the lessons in the stories, particularly on how we treat children, and his ideas about how stories are transmitted via the memplex mean that *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* deserves a wide audience.

Steve Toase

★★★★★

## Fatal Evidence

Professor Alfred Swain Taylor & the Dawn of Forensic Science

Helen Barrell

Pen & Sword History 2017

Pb, 231pp, illus, timeline, bib, notes, ind, £19.99, ISBN 9781473883413

The life of Alfred Swaine Taylor has all the hallmarks of a tale of an eminent Victorian scientist and scholar. Born into a relatively wealthy family in Northfleet, Kent, in 1806, Taylor went on to change the face of forensic science from the arena of the gentleman enquirer into that of the expert witness. Taylor's life in many ways characterises the Victorian period as his pragmatism usurped a middle-class scientific orthodoxy and replaced it with a far more democratic and philanthropic forensic practice.

Academically a big hitter, Taylor's surgical apprenticeship at Guy's Hospital marked

the start of an incredible rise through the ranks that found him appointed as the Professor of Medical Jurisprudence and Chemistry less than 10 years later. Other accolades were to follow – notably becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1845 and editor of the *London Medical Gazette* in the same year – but it was in the field of medical jurisprudence that he was to make his mark. Barrell cleverly illustrates Taylor's achievements with reference to a plethora of cases in which he appears as a pathologist and expert witness, and at the heart of his story is his lifelong fascination with poisons, specifically arsenic and its identification.

For the aficionado of the grisly Victorian murder there is plenty to choose from, but the more celebrated cases of the day such as the Sarah Chesham and William Palmer poisonings allow Barrell scope to scrutinise Taylor's contribution to medical and legal evidence gathering. We subsequently discover how Taylor broke new ground in hæmatology and the relationship between body temperature and death whilst working on the recalibration of the thermometer. It is his doggedness that makes it no surprise that he also contributed to fields as diverse as photography and geology! Not one to let sleeping dogs lie, we discover that only the Waterloo Bridge Mystery, 1857 – a real 'penny dreadful' – remained unsolved, and interestingly he was the 'go to' man in the Fanny and Stella case of 1870 in which

male sexuality was placed under the microscope of Victorian prurience and prudery.

Taylor largely withdrew from public life by 1870, and until his death in 1880 his legacy rested in his defining forensic texts – *Elements of Medical Jurisprudence* (1836) and *On Poisons* (1848) and yet he became an inspirational personality to writers such as Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins.

For us, the modern reader, Taylor lives, perhaps, not through his scientific contributions but as the grandfather of the firebrand forensic expert so beloved of fiction, film and TV.

Taylor's eventful life is organised chronologically. Barrell

provides us with excellent notes, illustrations, a timeline and a detailed index (ideal for the researcher interested in his legal appearances). *Fatal Evidence* is a must read for any lover of crime writing, criminology and Victorian cultural history.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

## The Stone Tide

Adventures at the End of the World

Gareth E Rees

Influx Press 2018.

Pb, 364pp, illus, £9.99, ISBN 9781910312070

Engaging and touching psychogeographical exploration of present-day and historical Hastings, the down-at-heel seaside town to which the narrator and his wife have relocated. Their attempts to renovate a dilapidated Victorian terraced house reveal clues about its former residents, but also puts their marriage under increasing strain.

The narrator's hapless DIY skills – contrasted with his wife's practicality and increasing exasperation – provide entertainment, as do his failure to deal with a coughing seagull interloper and a decaying rat beneath the floorboards. Even his ongoing mystery testicular pains offer amusement. But the unfolding of a gradually-dissolving marriage is genuinely moving.

Endearing eccentricities – such as a teenagers' diagram illustrating the terrifying if invented tale of a giant mutant eel – are tempered by darker moments.

The narrator's best friend Mike, who died in a rock-climbing accident some years before, periodically reappears; a literal haunting that gives expression to grief and loss. A fractious encounter between former Hastings residents John Logie Baird and Aleister Crowley is a wonderfully plausible fantasy in which the Beast lambasts the inventor of television for allowing his creation to be employed merely for light entertainment, when it could have served as a vessel for the coming New Aeon.

This collision of the fabulous

with everyday life of television, DIY, pubs and hospitals encapsulates Hastings, whose layers of national history and local legend are uncovered by the narrator, whilst at the same time excavating his own past. Memories, imagination and interior life intrude upon and merge with present-day reality.

Chris Josiffe

★★★★★

## Plate Tectonics

A Ladybird Expert Book

Iain Stewart

Michael Joseph 2018

Pb, 56pp, illus, £7.99, ISBN 9780718187187

*The Ladybird Book of Plate Tectonics* is a book title which is right up there with 'Existentialism for Fun and Profit', but that is what we have here. It is part of a new series of 'Ladybird Expert Books' – short works for an adult readership, apparently aimed at those too

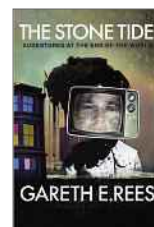
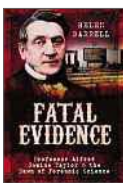
busy to look up Wikipedia. Consisting of 23 small double spreads with a page of writing facing rather ho-hum coloured illustrations, it won't take anyone long to read. Being by Iain Stewart, the text is approachable and well-written, as one would expect. It is long on the history of geology leading up to plate tectonic theory, and short on the current state of the art, which is probably a good thing. The end papers show a map of

world tectonic plates which, like most such maps you will ever see, is simplistic and decades out of date.

Which plate does Tokyo sit on? According to the map, it's on the Eurasian Plate, but actually, no one really knows. In fact, any map that shows all plate boundaries as nice neat lines dividing up the Earth's crust like a jigsaw puzzle is not really realistic. The Aegean and Balkans are such a mish-mash that one can only say that any plate boundary there is a broad smear across the whole region. But then this is a Ladybird Book, after all.

Roger Musson

★★★★★





# Mundane roads?

Strange things – ABCs, Black Dogs, UFOs – can appear in the most ordinary settings

## Paranormal Encounters on Britain's Roads

Phantom Figures, UFOs and Missing Time

Peter A McCue

The History Press 2018

Pb, 176pp, notes, bib, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9780750984386

Peter McCue cites several experiences from my 'Old Man of Halsall Moss' (OMHM) article [FT328:32–39]. However, this very good book approaches the subject of weird stuff on our roads from an angle different from mine and others'. Sean Tudor (of Blue Bell Hill fame) and I have tended to focus on phantom hitchhikers /jaywalkers and other road ghosts, particularly in one (broad) location.

Peter has taken the admirable stance that the apparitions experienced on our roads may be part of the same phenomenon, which can manifest in a kaleidoscope of different ways. He adds in phantom vehicles and aircraft, Alien Big Cats, Black Dogs, mysterious light phenomena, UFOs, 'Missing Time', and vehicle interference.

This 'horizontal' approach means that he sets out a wide range of experiences, and allocates them according to type, rather than location. Consequently the various OMHM experiences that I wrote about are spread across different chapters. This approach means that Peter does not go into too much detail about most of the events/experiences. There were many cases that I was unfamiliar with, which was tantalising because I wanted to know a lot more about them! Fortunately, the excellent

notes, bibliography and index mean that the reader can follow up the cases with ease.

Peter is a clinical psychologist, and this comes over in some of his evaluations. Nevertheless, he presents the material in an open-minded way, reflecting that he is a cautious believer in the reality of the phenomena. As a good fortune, he is convinced that strange things happen, but he is by no means certain how and why.

The first chapter usefully brings together descriptions and definitions of the different paranormal manifestations and theories he later refers to: ESP; physical effects; and apparitions

and haunting. The latter touches on subjects such as alternative realities and 'psychic internets'. Therefore it can act as a helpful reference point in its own right.

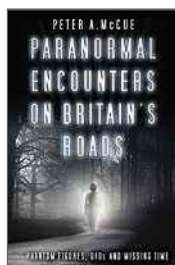
Peter inserts his comments and theories about specific cases immediately after their

descriptions, so the reader is regularly considering the quality and consistency of events and evaluating potential causes and explanations.

Some may find that there is a slightly academic hue, but I found Peter's conversational style and his approach made the book very readable. Many names quoted will be familiar to FT readers, as will some of the topics and cases covered. The book manages to be interesting to general readers and to those with a special interest in paranormal and UFO matters. It highlights that strange things can happen anywhere and in the most mundane of settings. This is a useful addition to your fortune bookshelf, a book you can lend to friends to pique their interest and widen their horizons.

Rob Gandy

★★★★★



## Fantasyland

How America Went Haywire: A 500-Year History

Kurt Andersen

Random House 2016

Hb, 462pp, ind, \$30, ISBN 9781588366870

I live in a small town in the rural Midwest, the heart of Donald Trump country and the reason he occupies the White House. Most of his support, here and elsewhere, derives from older, less educated, non-urban white people, suspicious of the larger America that is less

and less like them, more and more populated by Those People from whom their candidate promises to save them and Make America Great Again.

Our current kakistocracy – a 17th-century word recently revived, meaning rule by the worst – has naturally generated massive discussion and debate among journalists, pundits, historians, political scientists, psychologists, and thoughtful lay citizens. If the American republic survives Trumpism, which is not as certain as one would like, this moment will be scrutinised for decades. In the meantime, books pondering the causes of our contemporary madness are proliferating, best characterised as the second draft of history after the reporters' first.

In *Fantasyland*, New York City-based media maven Kurt Andersen's social outlook is like mine: secular, agnostic, liberal. With the exception of his passing treatments of anomalies and the paranormal – i.e., the province of fools and charlatans, period, no ifs, ands, buts, irritating nuances or complications; Mitch Horowitz's uniquely excellent *Occult America* would have guided him more assuredly through these thickets – I don't quarrel with much in

particular.

I am not sure, however, that his overall conclusion – that Trump happened largely because American history is riddled with a specifically American craziness – will survive the cooler assessments of future, or even present-day, historians, when the trends Trump represents (nativism, racism, authoritarianism) are as troublingly ubiquitous in European societies. On the other hand, the idea will do as a framework for the sort of book Andersen

wanted to write.

Unfortunately, it lacks both end notes and bibliography; so if you don't know the literature on which it draws and you want to dig deeper, you're on your own.

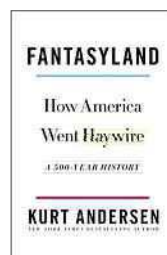
On the other hand, the landscape of American eccentricity makes for an amusing visit. In any such odyssey our distinctive religiosity, beginning at the nation's founding, is a prominent feature. On that subject Andersen can be hilarious. My favourite observation is on the Book of Mormon: "If one considers the Bible, in the main, to be historical fiction, then what Joseph Smith produced was a monumental and pioneering work of fan fiction, the most successful ever." All the usual suspects show up, and if you know your American cultural history, most of it will be familiar.

Throughout, you are aware that it comes to no good end; in other words to an ignorant, bullying, conspiracy-theorising blowhard whose democratic bones, if they exist, are small and inconsequential. In short, a standard-issue barstool rant, only with more money. Worse, with more power than anyone else on Earth.

The notion is enough to turn this heathen's thoughts to prayer.

Jerome Clark

★★★★★





## ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTÉAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

### Colin Wilson

**Philosopher of Optimism**

Brad Spurgeon

Michael Butterworth 2017

Pb, 122pp, £11.99, ISBN 9780955267208

Towards the end of his life, the philosopher Colin Wilson, currently enjoying some renewed attention, gave a long interview to author Brad Spurgeon, and this forms the core of this slim work, now in its second printing. Wilson explains his "philosophy of optimism", expanding his ideas about "peak experiences" and "intentionality", with examples of how we can properly use the full potential of our minds. Here too are reprints of supplementary articles on his approach to criminology and the occult.

### Living with the Living Dead

**The Wisdom of the Zombie Apocalypse**

Greg Garrett

Oxford University Press 2016

HB, 248pp, illus, notes, ind, \$24.95, ISBN 9780190260453

Professor Greg Garrett focuses his undoubted erudition upon the 'zombie apocalypse' in all its cultural and commercial forms. Whatever its origins, it has become thoroughly integrated into the contemporary world as a metaphor for the paradoxical and often nihilistic values of our troubled times. Somehow – amongst the gore, decomposing flesh and struggle against impossible numbers of the unthinking dead – he manages to find a message of hope. It is teaching us to appreciate what it means to be really alive! It may well be an academic joke, but Garrett's wit carries it off well. It's a good read.

### Remnants

**Tales of Fenland Horrors and Hauntings**

Robert C Poyton

Innsmouth Gold 2017

Pb, 199pp, illus, £9.99, ISBN 9780995645424

"The East Anglia Fens are a place of mystery and imagination.

The spectral landscape broods under a wide sky. Lonely roads lead to ruined abbeys. Narrow tracks meander off into the marshes. The fog draws suddenly in and there is always the ever-present, deep, dark water."

With this introduction, it seems the Fens form a perfectly natural setting for Poyton's 13 short stories inspired by MR James and Lovecraft and published by Innsmouth Gold, his outlet for his Chthulu mythos-inspired music. *FT* readers – Poyton is one – will enjoy the allusions in these genuinely creepy and well-written stories of archaic horrors in a modern, if damp, landscape.

### Suspicious Minds

**Why We Believe Conspiracy Theories**

Rob Brotherton

Bloomsbury Sigma 2015

Hb, 304pp, refs, notes, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781472915610

More than just another book on conspiracy theories (CTs), Brotherton's study grew out of his doctoral thesis on the psychology of conspiracies and the belief in them by individuals and society in general. Among its main strengths is the author's grasp of this as a social and psychological phenomenon that has been around as long as the human mind. Indeed, one of his starting points is the way the mysterious death of Rome's first king, Romulus, was used politically. Another is the project, begun in 2014 by American political scientists Joe Uscinski and Joseph Parent, which attempted to measure the extent and characteristics of the phenomenon by analysing a century's worth of letters to the *New York Times*. Contrary to contemporary opinion, the level of mention was lower than one per cent in the sample of around 100,000 letters.

Not only are conspiracy theories not as widespread as believed (or as promoted by careless journalism) but apart from two 'spikes' (mid-1890s and 1950), the baseline was consistently low level from 1890 to 2010. Ten

chapters dissect different types of CTs, their 'vectors', promoters and people to whom they appeal. This sober yet very readable and up-to-date overview will appeal not to the swivel-eyed, but to anyone interested in CTs as a social phenomenon. Dr Brotherton, of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit of the University of London, has it impressively covered.

### Astronaut Gods of the Maya

**Extraterrestrial Technologies in the Temples and Sculptures**

Erich von Däniken

Bear & Co 2017

Pb, 260pp, illus, colour plates, notes, ind, \$22.00, ISBN 9781591432357

Yes, it is the Old Master banging on the same Old Drum, but there is sufficient new material here to make his return to publishing fascinating. As we've said before, It helps to ignore the 'ancient astronaut' preaching and concentrate on the genuine archaeological and anthropological mysteries von Däniken is investigating.

He has gone out into the field and got his hands dirty and that surely earns some respect, and the right to ask some important questions. While his main chapters explain why he believes Mayan cultural artefacts are remnants of, or inspired by, visiting aliens, he has very interesting sections on the New Guinea cargo cult and the temples of southern India. Like his recent *Impossible Truths*, this book is packed with stunning full colour plates and other unfamiliar images of the enigmas in question.

### The Battle of St Monans

**The Story of Scotland's Forgotten Battle**

Leonard Low

Savage Publishers 2017

Pb, 157pp, illus, bib, £9.95, ISBN 9781904246466

In 1548, a Scottish army, reeling from routs at Musselburgh and Edinburgh, turned and thrashed the invading English troops near

the abbey of St Monan in Fife.

The loss of life was heavy and yet, writes local historian Leonard Low, there are memorials and books aplenty devoted to other, lesser battles, but none to this decisive one. He searched for several years for the reason, during which he located rare documents that suggested the blame rests with Oliver Cromwell.

In 1650, Cromwell ordered all Scottish records to be shipped to the Tower of London but, en route, 85 barrels' worth were lost when the ship foundered near Newcastle, and among them were those for the year 1548. More records were lost when the abbey was looted in 1560. However, a hand-written account, done for Mary Queen of Scots, was found in a private library and from it Low was able to reconstruct the events from start to conclusion, here published for the first time.

### Doing Rude Things

**The History of the British Sex Film**

David McGillivray

Wolfbait 2017

Hb, 170pp, illus, ind, £13.95, ISBN 9781999744151

First published in 1992, David McGillivray's *Doing Rude Things* offered a then unique insider's insight into one of the weirder, wilder and quite extinct areas of British filmmaking. This new and substantially expanded edition, then, is extremely welcome at a time when the kind of titting sexual prurience that sustained a whole cottage industry – from the naturist films of the 1950s, through the Robin Asquith sex-comedies of the 1970s, to the softcore porn VHS tapes of the early 1980s – seems like another, and rather innocent, country. In an age when unsimulated sex spices up arthouse films, it's hard to imagine a market for *Naked – As Nature Intended, What's Up Nurse?* or *Come Play With Me*. At the same time, McGillivray's book itself helped pave the way for a critical reassessment of a whole area previously consigned to the dustbin of British cinema history, as he acknowledges in the updated portions of this witty, charming and essential book.





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## The sound of silence

Popcorn-munchers and crisp-rustlers take note: in a cinematic world where any accidental sound can result in sudden death, silence is your friend...



### A Quiet Place

Dir John Krasinski, US 2017  
On UK release

With marketing campaigns so often ruining movies by using trailers as a super-cut of the story and revealing too many of its twists, the restraint applied to the marketing campaign for *A Quiet Place* has ensured that the film maintains its mysteries until the audience actually sees them unfold on the big screen. In keeping with that restraint, nothing pertaining to the specifics of the plot will be revealed in this review, other than to say that it focuses on the plight of a family who have to live in silence if they are to evade an enemy that hunts by sound.

Something several critics have remarked on are the parallels between actor/director John Krasinski's latest effort and last year's superbly unnerving *It Comes at Night*. While the two films are very different thematically – *It Comes at Night* is a more abstract tale filled with allegories and ambiguity,

### *The sound design is what keeps the audience on the edge of their seats*

while *A Quiet Place* is a more straightforward thriller – they do share some commonalities, the major one being the element of dread. Much as the mystery of what is actually going on in *It Comes at Night* makes the film almost unbearably tense – a tension largely achieved by the clever use of lighting and changing aspect ratios – *A Quiet Place* creates and maintains a similarly strong degree of suspense thanks to its intricate sound design.

Ironic as it may seem for a film that revolves around silence, the sound design is what continues to keep the audience on the edge of their seats during the film's many relentlessly tense sequences. Its efficiency manages to underline how all the mundane things we

absentmindedly do on a daily basis must be executed with utmost care in the world of the film, where they could easily become fatal. When sound does occur, it is mixed in a way that makes anything more than a gentle murmur thunderously loud, resulting in both the instinctive jump such loudness causes and a sense of dread at what might ensue after the silence is broken.

Technical aspects aside, a large portion of what makes any film work is obviously its cast, and *A Quiet Place* also manages to impress in this area. With Krasinski and Emily Blunt being husband and wife in real life, seeing them as a married couple on the big screen comes across as natural without overselling their bond. The actors portraying the couple's children are also good, with Millicent Simmonds a standout as daughter Regan. The emotional struggles that come with the family's situation and the experiences they go through add additional emotional weight to the film, ensuring that

the characters are thoroughly relatable and easy for the audience to invest in.

As expertly as it manages to walk that incredibly thin line between thriller and horror, the film is not entirely faultless: even with the sound design being as good as it is, and quite enough to leave your nerves irreparably frazzled, Krasinski can't resist throwing in a few too many jump scares, which detract from the film's overall impact.

In the same way that Jordan Peele impressed with 2017's acclaimed *Get Out*, Krasinski also scores with his first outing as a horror director. Paradoxical as it may seem to some that two well-known comedians excel at making horror, the correlation between what makes comedy and horror work is really rather obvious: both genres rely heavily on strong scenarios, relatable characters and an impeccable sense of timing. *A Quiet Place* has all of these elements, and is an unusually terrifying cinematic experience too.

Leyla Mikkelsen



### Ready Player One

Dir Steven Spielberg, US 2018  
On UK release

For decades, Steven Spielberg has been responsible for creating many a fond movie memory in the minds of moviegoers – relentless sharks, rampaging dinosaurs and adventurous archaeologists with a knack for punching Nazis – and there were high expectations of what he could do with Ernest Cline's highly imaginative *Ready Player One*. In this adaptation of the bestselling novel, we are, as in the book, introduced to a dystopian near-future world where people escape the misery



## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! ([www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com](http://www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com))

### Night of the Living Dead

Dir George Romero, US 1968  
Criterion Collection UK, £16.99 (Blu-ray)

I'll always be grateful that I got the chance to meet the late George A Romero. In inventing the 'modern' zombie, he unleashed a pop-culture juggernaut that's still tearing chunks out of new shoulders, even today. Yet in the flesh, he was as self-deprecating and humble as I'd always been told. Mention the socio-political power of *Dawn of the Dead*, for example, and he'd just chuckle. "I was always focused on the 'surface story,'" he'd shrug.

He was particularly humble about *Night of the Living Dead*, a 97-minute stick of dynamite that not only changed the face of horror movies, but indie cinema in general. He may have tagged the film's progressive nature as a happy accident, but there's a clear revolution in the ballsy (and crucially, almost blasé) way he casts a black man as the hero. Add a child stabbing her mum to death with a trowel, along with extras chowing down on cattle offal right in the camera lens, and we see a director who may well have been humble, but behind the humility had an almost automatic desire to push at the pillars of society just to see how fun and profound it is when they fall.

Do I really need to tell you the plot of this film? It's been replicated so many times that you'll have seen it in countless other forms. But this tale of a world overcome by cannibalistic corpses (they're referred to as 'ghouls' in the movie, not 'zombies') is filled with evidence that, despite his modesty, Romero's film is certainly not brilliant by



### When I met Romero we were in a Milton Keynes shopping mall

accident.

There's a great bonus feature on this new release, for example, that breaks down how many frames feature in each shot of a sequence. It's a lesson in Romero's mastery of the edit – a skill honed in the high turnover, super-quick world of TV advertising. We also learn of his natural musicality, picking stock music cues and weaving them together into an unforgettable score. Not to

mention the fact that he was quietly inventing a scenario that refuses to die, even 50 years later.

This new Criterion Collection 4K restoration is a delight, with fantastic picture quality and some terrific new extras too, although two older features stand out: a vintage talk show from the late 1970s, where a fresh-faced, cigarette smoking Romero and *Phantasm* director Don Coscarelli discuss horror, and another extra featuring a series of interviews with the Pittsburgh locals who played zombies in the film.

Stephen King is often hailed as the man who brought the Gothic to middle America. But in *Night of the Living Dead*, Romero did precisely that when he set his horror tale not in the mountains of Transylvania, but in a mundane, everyday farmhouse in Pittsburgh, PA. When I met Romero, it was in similarly banal surroundings. We were in a Milton Keynes shopping mall, surrounded by department store dummies and coffee shops. We talked horror in the midst of everyday life – which is precisely what many of his films do (e.g. *Dawn and Day of the Dead*, *Martin*, *Season of the Witch* and *Creepshow*). Having the dead walk right into our towns and our homes isn't the only reason *Night* and Romero's other films endure, but I suspect it's one of the strongest reasons why we can't turn away from them



of their lives by entering a virtual reality realm known as The Oasis, and it is within this realm that most of the film plays out.

While Spielberg has kept the overarching narrative structure of Cline's book, a substantial amount of the specific contents has been altered. Instead of the book's saturation in 1980's pop culture, the references in the film are broader, encompassing elements associated with contemporary geek and gaming culture. Thankfully, what Spielberg has managed to achieve with this approach is to capture the spirit of the book while ensuring that the uninitiated are more easily ensnared by the film's treasure trove of references drawn from a much wider spectrum.

In terms of what these alterations specifically entail, one is best served by going in knowing as little as possible; the film is a visual spectacle, and the revelation of those reworked set pieces should not be spoiled, as they make for some of the most enjoyable moments inside *The Oasis*.

The success with which this virtual world is brought to life makes for a thrilling and engaging setting; however, it is in the contrast between the real world and the virtual reality versions of the characters that the film's greatest flaws become apparent. While the *Oasis* sequences are well executed in terms of suspension of disbelief and entertainment value, the same cannot be said for the real-world portions of the film, which are hampered by hammy performances and character development that is hamstrung by poor pacing and lack of depth. Things often feel rushed and shallow as a result, and this lack of gravitas also gradually undermines the menace of Ben Mendelsohn's villain, Nolan Sorrento, just as the general sense of urgency also dwindles as the film goes on.

Lacking in depth and substance, *Ready Player One* is far from being a masterpiece, but the gleefully creative visuals and the myriad of onscreen references are a delight and the film manages to evoke smiles and laughter throughout with its larger-than-life geeky action set pieces. A master of his craft,



Spielberg manages to remind the viewer why he is so good at creating adventure cinema, but at the same time one wishes that as much effort had been put into fleshing out the film's real world as its virtual one; a more telling contrast between the two would have elevated *Ready Player One* to the cinematically exalted ranks inhabited by those aforementioned sharks, dinosaurs and archaeologists.

Leyla Mikkelsen



## I Kill Giants

Dir Anders Walter, US 2017  
On UK release

Barbara (Madison Wolfe) is a teenage girl growing up in a small coastal town on Long Island. With the sea on one side and the forest on the other, she can run and play and make dens to her heart's content. But she is a troubled outsider: withdrawn, spiky, friendless. She seems obsessed with fantasy, of the geeky Dungeons & Dragons variety, and has painstakingly constructed imaginary worlds of her own. These involve the existence of giants – wholly malevolent creatures that periodically appear out of nowhere to threaten her hometown with utter destruction. Barbara is convinced that she alone has the power to defeat these monsters.

Of course what the film explores is whether Barbara's fantasies may actually have some truth to them or are the product of a disturbed mind – and if it is the latter, what has caused it. It does this by concentrating on Barbara's life at home and at school. At home, she is cared for by her elder sister Karen (Imogen Poots) in lieu of their strangely absent parents; at school, her only allies appear to be the recently-arrived English girl Sophia (Sydney Wade) and kindly counsellor Mrs Molle (Zoe Saldana). Her nemesis is the frightful Taylor (Rory Jackson), your stereotypical school bully.

The film is much less the dark (-ish) fantasy that it is being promoted as than it is a reasonably straightforward coming of age drama. I confess I haven't read the 2008 comic books by Joe Kelly and JM Ken Nimura on which the film is based, but judging by the

poster, which features an image of Barbara armed with a massive warhammer facing down a colossal beastie, with the words 'From the producers of Harry Potter', it's fair to say *I Kill Giants* was not what I was expecting, and I think that will also be true for a good proportion of its audience.

That's not to say it's a bad film – far from it – but I don't think it is quite what it is purporting to be – at least in the publicity aspect.

In fact, what it most reminds me of is Terry Gilliam's *The Fisher King*. Like Robin Williams's character in Gilliam's film, Barbara is a quixotic hero whose fantasies are frighteningly vivid but rooted in a profound but earthbound human trauma. Gradually, director Anders Walter dissects Barbara's personality to reveal exactly what this trauma was, and he does this with genuine skill; I was quietly congratulating myself on having figured it all out well in advance only to be wrong-footed through skilful storytelling.

The film benefits from one terrific performance: Madison Wolfe's in the central role. Barbara is really not a terribly sympathetic individual – she is confrontational, rude, uncommunicative, selfish and insensitive to others – so it's quite a challenge for a young actress to make this character a person with whom the audience wants to spend time. In order to do that Wolfe brings out Barbara's better qualities: loyalty, determination, resourcefulness and courage. It's quite a display of acting skill and the film is worth watching for her alone. Sadly, the other characters are not quite so well drawn and as a result the film seems unbalanced at times, with this single compelling character at one end of the seesaw and precious little at the other.

I'm afraid I can't say to what extent *I Kill Giants* is faithful to its source material, so fans of the comics will have to decide for themselves. What I can say, though, is that if you approach the film on its own terms – as opposed to what the promotional blurb would have you believe – then you'll be rewarded with an insightful, witty and moving account of a young girl trying to make sense of an inescapable horror that has intruded into her world.

Daniel King



## SHORTS

### THE CURED

Limited cinema release 11 May; Arrow Films, £15.99 (DVD)

Zombie films reached saturation point long ago, and I'm sure the people behind *The Cured* would argue that it's not really a zombie film at all; while they'd have a germ of a point, that would be slightly disingenuous. After all, it does feature a horde of the 'infected', military types in hazmat suits and plenty of face-munching action. The set-up is Europe (in this case Ireland) finding its feet again after a devastating virus which turned people into ultra-violent, blood crazed maniacs. A vaccine has resulted in 75 per cent of the infected population being cured. Unfortunately, they remember vividly everything they did whilst out of control, and their reintegration back into a society still reeling from horror and grief is causing turmoil. Despite Ellen Page's star billing the film is largely about Senan (Sam Keeley), a young man undergoing such a reintegration. He just wants to keep his head down but is pestered by Conor (Tom Vaughan-Lawlor), a friend from the facility where they were both cured, who is getting increasingly militant about the way he and the rest of the cured are being discriminated against, not just by the baying mob but also by the authorities. Conor is torn between his desire for a normal life and the responsibility he feels to stand up for the rights of the cured. The film actually has an interesting, and timely, point to make about the integration of a minority group into a society that perceives it to be threatening. This fear of the 'other' leads to prejudice and ill-treatment which, in turn, results in eruptions of violence from the extreme elements within the minority, which feels it has been provoked beyond endurance. In this sense the film uses familiar horror tropes to explore a worthwhile topic, and for that reason alone is worth one's attention. It's a slight disappointment then that in the final hour the film falls back on overused zombie stylings. It's well-handled and undeniably visceral, but it's been done countless times before. The film is, by design, unrelentingly bleak, but the other side of that coin is that it feels drab and is often a bit of a grind. Overall, it's a flawed but admirable attempt to do something challenging and topical with an increasingly stale sub-genre. **DK** ★★★★★

### COLD MOON

Bulldog Films, £9.99 (DVD)

In the small town of Babylon, Florida, a killer is on the loose. 16-year-old Margaret is attacked and killed by a sinister masked figure then dumped in the local river, weighed down by her bicycle. Her brother and grandmother (Chester Rushing and Candy Clark) are naturally distraught; the grandmother in particular seems to have been sent mad with grief and is convinced that the murderer is the local bank manager Nathan Redfield (Josh Stewart). Investigating the crime is Sheriff Ted (Frank Hale) whose teenage daughter Belinda is, unbeknownst to her father, having a sexual relationship with Redfield. Meanwhile, the killer is tormented by a terrifying ghostly apparition which is driving him to the verge of insanity. A more lurid version of *Peyton Place* then, one might say. In fact, the juxtaposition of the minutiae of small-town American life and the horrifying and supernatural is something that has worked well in books and films over the years, especially for Stephen King. *Cold Moon* isn't quite in that league but it does come from a well-respected literary source, namely Michael McDowell – perhaps most famous for writing the screenplay for *Beetlejuice*. King was a big admirer of McDowell's and that should be enough of a recommendation for horror fans. Strictly speaking, this is Southern gothic horror, itself a long established sub-genre, but this fast-moving adaptation of McDowell's 1980 novel *Cold Moon over Babylon* is very much a modern take. There's a good performance from Josh Stewart, a brief turn by Christopher Lloyd as Redfield's invalid father and a blink-and-you'll-miss-it appearance by Tommy Wiseau, the hapless actor-director recently portrayed by James Franco in *The Disaster Artist*. **DK** ★★★★★





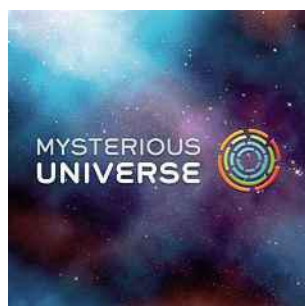
## SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTÉAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called 'the airwaves'.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore 'pirate' pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality 'spoken word' content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of 'legitimate' broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortéan topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortéan topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



**Podcast:** *Mysterious Universe*  
**mysteriousuniverse.org**

**Hosts:** Benjamin Grundy,  
Aaron Wright

**Episode Count:** 18 seasons of  
13-24 episodes

**Format:** Magazine format,  
interviews, discussions

**Established:** 2006

**Frequency:** Weekly

**Topics:** Everything of fortéan  
interest

With a running time of anywhere from an hour to over 90 minutes, the *Mysterious Universe* podcast is nothing if not eclectic in its choice of topics to cover.

The two hosts – founder Benjamin Grundy and Aaron Wright – usually appear together and have a nice line in sparky repartee that, like many of the podcasts covered recently, is of radio broadcast quality.

At the time of writing, everything from Season 11 – which debuted in January

2014 – onwards is available free at the website to listen to or download. Anything earlier than that is only available for as 'paid for' content, either as individual episodes (at \$9 per month, which includes longer editions of the regular podcasts) or in a 'megapack' containing all the previous *Mysterious Universe* podcasts (\$99 all in).

*Mysterious Universe* is largely news-driven, picking up items of fortéan interest from current affairs and giving them in-depth coverage. The current Season includes editions focusing on the 'deep history' of Theosophy (18.18), the Yowie and other Australian cryptids (18.15), appropriate as the podcast is based in Australia), the occult underground of Brighton (18.14), the nature of consciousness (18.04), and a new take on the UFO phenomenon in 'Reframing the UFO Debate' (18.03).

Topics covered in episodes since 2014 include the question of whether Moses was a genuine historical figure or simply a character from myth (11.02), the impact of psychedelics on modern culture (11.03), the lost lands of Atlantis and Lemuria (11.06), and Anne Jacobson on Project Paperclip and the Nazi scientists brought to the

US to create the American space programme (11.11). In between Season 11 and Season 18, covering almost five years of output, there is a whole cornucopia of fortéan entertainment and discussion that can currently be enjoyed for free.

Each episode opens with a discussion between the two hosts, usually focused on current news and reports of weird happenings (taking in the first 20 minutes or so of most instalments), applying a dry sense of humour to the fortéan world. As Aaron Wright says on one edition: "We're still open minded, but there are some cases that if I see something that's garbage, I'm going to call it out as garbage."

The two presenters have been doing the job for long enough that they have an easy rapport, clearly enjoy being in each other's company and love talking about the weirdness of the wider world. Whatever the subject, the discussion between the hosts and with their guests is always informed and entertaining. It's also nice, as a UK listener, to hear the mysterious and unknown discussed in an Australian accent rather than the more usual American one...

Many guests have books on fortéan subjects to tout, others are promoting their

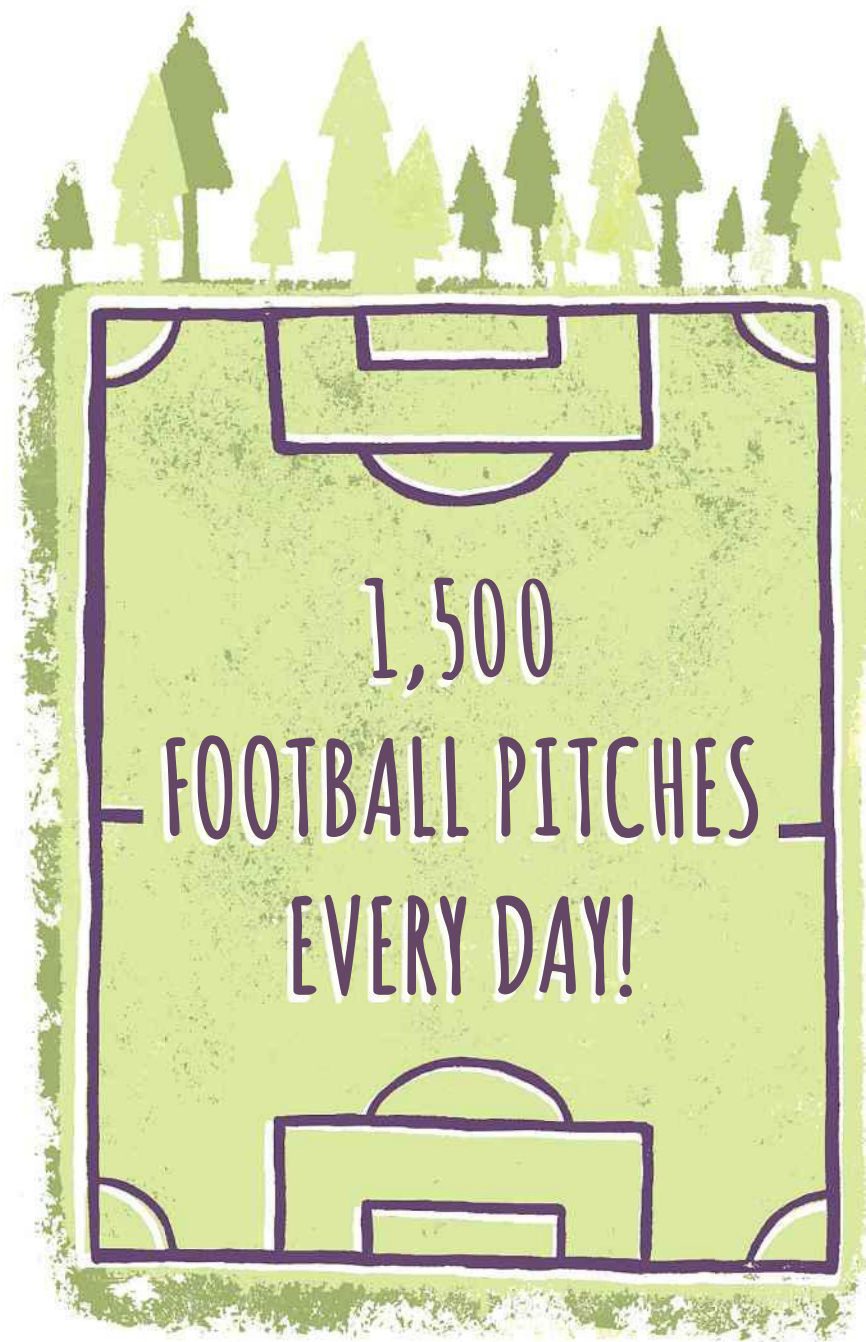
research or their own wacky theories. *Mysterious Universe* is less credulous than Howard Hughes British podcast *The Unexplained*; they don't simply take everything presented to them at face value and have a nicely cynical streak to their presentation, although often wrapped up in warm humour (a nice polite way of debunking).

One episode from October 2014 (14.14) has author Robbie Graham discussing the surprising links between Hollywood, screenwriters, and the depiction of flying saucers in cinema (see his series of articles in **F225-228**). The discussion covers what shapes the perception of the worldwide UFO mystery and whether the writers of movies (from 1950s gems like *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* to Steven Spielberg's 1970s classic *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) were simply inventive or whether they were drawing upon secret information. It's an interesting topic tackled in an entertaining way, which just about sums up most of the episodes of *Mysterious Universe*.

**Strengths:** Nice, easy banter between the excellent hosts.

**Weaknesses:** None.

**Recommended Episodes:** **UFO Attacks and Saucer Doctors (17.18 – are the denizens of flying saucers actually healing mankind?); The Merovingian Bloodline (17.12 – a fresh look at Rennes le Château and the stories about the descendants of Jesus); The 1885 Dingleston Messages (17.05 – high strangeness and time travel based around an English cottage); The 1896-97 US Airship Flap (15.23 – strange flying vehicles, breakaway civilisations, and 19th century anti-gravity); The Children of Roswell (15.07 – the seven-decade legacy of the UFO crash); Owls, Synchronicity, and the UFO Abductee (15.02 – bizarre synchronicities and alien abductions); The Witches' Ointment (14.17 – the secret history of psychedelic magic.**



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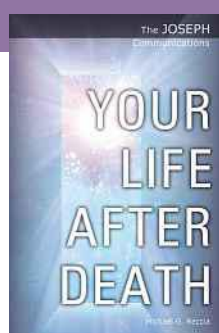
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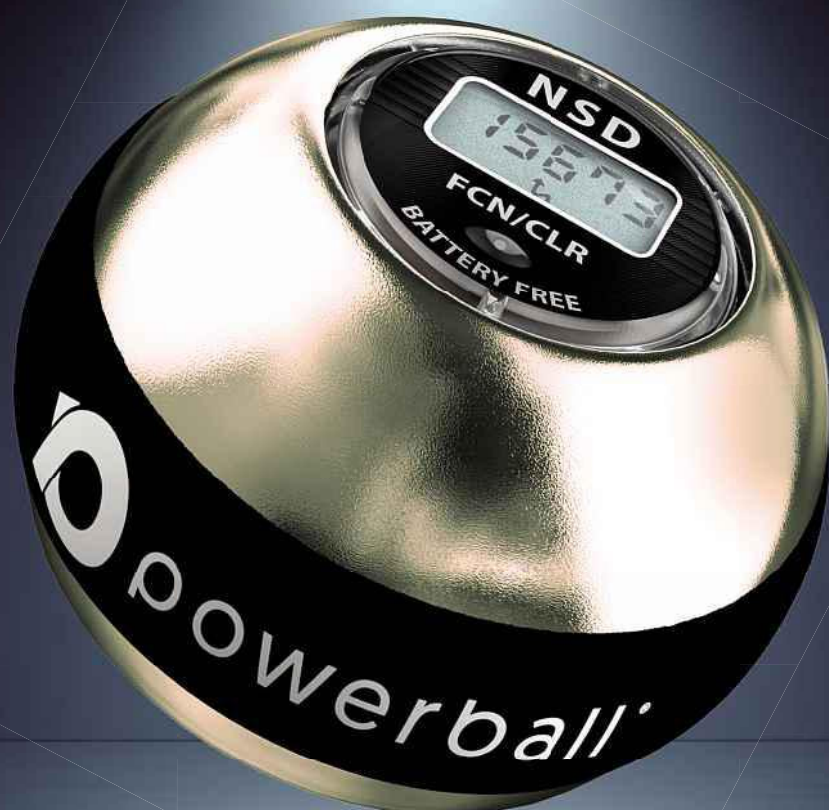
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# LETTERS

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## Slandering lizards

Kevan Hubbard's assertion that the gila monster and bearded lizard are the only venomous lizards [FT364:73] is out of date. The komodo dragon was discovered to kill using venom rather than toxic bacteria in 2009 (Fry et al. 2009 – <http://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0810883106>), and venom has been found in other species of monitors since (Koludarov et al. 2017 – <http://doi.org/10.3390/toxins9080242>).

**Victoria J Burton**

*Portsmouth, Hampshire*

Monitor lizards do in fact carry venom sacks (see this 2005 report in *New Scientist*: [www.newscientist.com/article/dn8331-lizards-poisonous-secret-is-revealed/](http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn8331-lizards-poisonous-secret-is-revealed/)).

**Richildis Tonks**

*By email*

## Malay manimals

On a recent trip to Malaysia's national park Taman Negara, I asked a Malay person about local knowledge of the *orang pendek*. I was informed that this entity is known in Malaysia as the *bunian* and is held to be a spiritual being while at the same time physically real – to me, this sounds like a contradiction in terms. However, the guide knew of several relatively recent sightings, telling of a woman who was lost in the forest for 19 days but survived with help from a *bunian*. On another occasion, a guide told me that the *orang pendek* is locally known as *orang hijau* and is a miniature human being that can move very fast. The guide had personally heard *orang hijau* talking without seeing them and knew of two or three mountain guides who had encountered a green *orang hijau* less than a decade ago. According to this informant, the belief on Sumatra is that the *orang pendek* is of normal colour. Curiously, however, this conversation took place while I was interviewing the chief of a village of the indigenous Bateq tribe (a Semang group) – and the chief and his cousin knew nothing at all about the *orang pendek*. Does this mean that we are dealing with exclusively Malay (and Sumatran) folklore alien to the 'original aborigines'? Or, as seems more likely from the rest of my interview,

## SIMULACRA CORNER



### Seaside saucer

Kevin Liddy photographed this 'flying saucer' cloud in Morecambe on 6 January 2018, facing west towards Barrow. It dissipated after a few minutes.

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to [sieveking@forteanimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteanimes.com).*

were the Bateq spokesmen – who appeared very timid – reluctant to share any valuable information with me? The interview took place at Kampung Dedari on 6 March 2018.

**Marinus van der Sluijs**  
*Namyangju, South Korea*

## Still grounded

Regarding Paul Devereux's article on paranormal research ['Koestler's legacy', FT201:32-39], I can identify the Nobel prize-winning physicist and Transcendental Meditation practitioner who

visited Arthur Koestler's institute to test his powers of levitation through Yogic Flying and see if they were measurable, but the act of leaping in the air disturbed the equipment. In the article, Ruth Tudge declined to reveal his name, but I can tell you he was Brian Josephson, who gained his Nobel prize in 1973 for work on quantum tunnelling. He went on to embrace all sorts of New Age whimsy and fringe science. I was a member of the Transcendental Meditation movement for many years and the story of Brian and his visit to prove "flying" was

popular around the dinner table. I don't know why he doesn't appear in any of the TM promotional material, as they usually use celebrities for easy publicity. To date, nobody has demonstrated that Maharishi's Sutra for levitation has resulted in people hovering, let alone flying through the air at will, which was the early promise.

**Richard Hughes**

*By email*

## Lunatics?

Jim Edenbaum expresses uncertainty about what to call an inhabitant of the Moon [FT365:75]. HG Wells, in *The First Men in the Moon*, used the term Selenite, but that is a work of fiction and we'd be here all day what with Baron Munchausen and the rest. I think that the most likely spontaneous neologism would be "moonman", although in the current climate of vindictive identity politics it would probably be safer to say "moonperson". The furtive imagination of conspiracists would give us John Lear's Greys, all snug in their subterranean bases (sublunary bases?); and the furthest wacky reaches of David Icke's bandwagon would give us Wowane and Mpanku of Zulu lore, because the Moon is artificial and was brought here to intimidate the natives, don'tcha know? Finally, it is fun to remember that Cyrano De Bergerac, taking time off his busy schedule of solving crimes on Jersey, pretended to be from the Moon in order to provide diversionary cover for Roxanne's wedding to Christian de Neuville, even though it tore him up inside.

**James Wright**

*Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex*

## Raining Cats

It seems that the 'Raining Cats' story mentioned by Nils Erik Grande [FT363:69] is still doing the rounds of parish magazines. I spotted a recounting of this story in the April 2018 edition of the *Ardingly Parish Magazine* [West Sussex], with the added detail that the clergyman was a "minister from South Africa".

**O Tate**

*Southwick, West Sussex*



# LETTERS

## Grown up violence

I can empathise with Tina Rath [FT363:69]. I was the same tender age in the mid-1970s when political machinations gave us headlines like ‘Cabinet Members Axed’; like her, I thought people were actually being killed and that this was an aspect of adult life I wasn’t looking forward to.

However, my credulity was strained when the girl next door returned from a holiday in France and informed me they had a machine that cut people’s heads off. I learnt about the infamous guillotine in due course but it was only in recent years that I discovered it was still in use until 1977.

**Jeff Tupholme**  
Salisbury, Wiltshire

## Red Cross

Regarding the symbol of the International Red Cross [FT364:51]: Henri Dunant (the founder of the Red Cross) was a Swiss citizen and adopted the symbol by reversing the colours of the Swiss flag (a white cross on a red background).

**Martin Jenkins**  
London

## Oops!

I am sorry to inform you that the sideline about a group of penguins setting up home in Felixstowe [FT365:10] is fictitious.

Other than the difficulties that penguins would face getting on and off a container ship and the likely national media coverage of such an event, the source is [www.suffolkgazette.com](http://www.suffolkgazette.com) and a quick look at this website reveals the tab at the top: “Suffolk Gazette Spoof news” and the tagline “You couldn’t make it up” beneath the header.

**James Emerson**  
By email

*Editor’s note: We nodded off there, I’m afraid. Still, it was an opportunity for an amusing drawing by Martin Ross.*

## Expanding Earth

Regarding my letter last issue [FT365:73]: Alfred Wegener didn’t really claim the expanding Earth as the cause of continental drift; but he did link his ideas to the expanding Earth hypothesis of Roberto Mantovani. The point remains that the main source of criticism (as I understand it) of Wegener’s ideas was that his proposed mechanism was considered untenable.

**Roger Musson**  
Edinburgh

## The Treasurer’s House

I was interested to be reacquainted with Harry Martindale’s alleged ghostly encounter of Roman soldiers at the

Treasurer’s House in Alan Murdie’s Ghostwatch column [FT364:18-20]. As I discovered while researching for my first book, *Yorkshire Stories of the Supernatural* (1999), a small research team, led by Steve Cliffe (editor of *Stockport Heritage* magazine), got permission to set up sound recording equipment in the cellars of the Treasurer’s House. Staff were under strict instructions

to stay away from the immediate area for the duration. In that time, sounds recorded included: sandals walking on a hard surface; someone breathing near the microphone; and possible musical sounds from a horn and a drum. Steve and his team compared the drumming sound to that of someone clanging a dustbin lid on the street above, and the ‘horn’ sounds to the noise of cars on the road and trains at nearby York railway station, but concluded that the sounds were quite dissimilar. FT readers can find out more in Steve Cliffe’s book *Shadows: a northern investigation of the unknown* (1998).

**Andy Owens**  
Boothtown, West Yorkshire

## Rosemary Brown

Alan Murdie’s piece on the extraordinary music-medium Rosemary Brown [FT363:16-18] brought memories flooding back for me, as an enthusiast of Franz Liszt’s incredible life and music. It doesn’t surprise me that RB claimed that Fliszt (as comedian Victor Borge called him) was the M.C., appearing first to her and then introducing to her a dozen or so dead white composers. During his lifetime Liszt was a believing Catholic, took minor holy orders (but not the celibacy vow, because he knew he’d break it), and according to a young student/secretary towards the end of Liszt’s life: “He could hear and see things that we could not.”

I’ve concluded that Liszt’s incredible power over audiences in his piano recitals was partly due to the pianist’s intuitive, creative nature; he’s still considered the greatest pianist of all time. Because of my Fliszt interest I read RB’s books, collected her piano music and spoke to those who had met her. John Lill, the British pianist who visited Australia in the 1970s, told me that RB was “doing exactly what she said she was doing”, with the proviso that, sometimes, she filled in bits – in the same style – where there was a gap in communication. Lill was famous for communing with the creative

energy of Beethoven, before he played that composer.

And the music? Yes, there are “grammatical” musical wobbles in places, but I, as a pianist/composer, could not have produced any of it, in the styles of so many very different composers. ‘Grubelei’ (Meditation), mentioned in Murdie’s column, was dictated and filmed as it happened by a film crew, as RB worked on it. Odd for them, as she had a one-sided conversation with Liszt, in the process: she hoped for a brilliant Hungarian Rhapsody, but Liszt assured her, she said, that he’d dictate something that would impress. When she went to the piano, after writing down the music, she couldn’t play it, as each hand has a different metre – Liszt the bomb-thrower at work! – but the producer could, remarking: “Mrs Brown, you’ve got something here!” Liszt’s late music, never performed, or published for 50 years after his death, is extremely experimental and harmonically daring and this piece fits right in. RB, a simple and unassuming woman, wouldn’t have known this music and once, for example, confused Bruckner and Bruch, two very different composers.

Coming to Britain in 1980, I tried to meet RB, but even at the spiritualist’s union they – pre-Internet – wouldn’t give out her address; she’d had enough of uninvited doorknockers, apparently. I hope the music archive is safe and deposited somewhere for researchers, as RB sat down, for hours, every day, and after meditating, worked with whomever Liszt brought through. Her book *Unfinished Symphonies* is a good read, not only about her work, but for piquant anecdotes such as Chopin warning RB that a filling bath upstairs, forgotten, was about to run over!

Hers was an extraordinary life for such a sincere and modest woman; she was chosen, it seems, just for these reasons, as a more brilliant musician/composer would have had no credibility. And as Liszt said to her, it wasn’t about the music per se; the whole purpose was to get people to consider the possibility that life continues after death. And since she was producing this amazing



“Next!”



music that could not be 'hers' – where was it coming from?

**David Hood**

*Richmond, Victoria, Australia*

## Divining

Regarding the feature on water magic [FT364:4-5]: my late father was a Senior Water Inspector with what was then the Three Valleys Water Co, in northwest Essex. He retired in the early 1990s, by which time all sorts of high-tech gismos were appearing, the theory being that they could find long-buried pipes with the minimum of time and effort. However, as with much new technology, the results were distinctly sporadic, and at such times Dad would be called and asked to help. Like some others, he didn't need dowsing rods; instead he would merely look vacant for a moment, before walking along the verge, scuffing with his heel at a certain point, and saying "There". He was never known to be wrong. When asked how he did it, he would put it down to 40 years' experience in the water industry, and promised his younger and much bemused colleagues that "they would pick it up in time if they were patient".

**Arthur Burton**

*By email*

Weirdly, just a week before your report on dowsing, I was speaking with a union colleague from a water company who in passing mentioned they regularly use dowsing, but have been told not to do this if the public can observe them! And some years ago, a relative of mine was refurbishing a farm building in Spain. To find a water supply a dowser was called in by his contractor, and this is how spring water is found when needed. Finally, a friend of mine who works for an engineering firm regularly uses dowsing, even on multi-million pound contracts. He says the company uses dowsing because "it works. It's not magic; they just haven't found out why it works, that's all."

**Andrew Coley**

*Leeds, West Yorkshire*

Science and folklore may not be as incompatible as some suggest

when it comes to dowsing. It's all a matter of the ideomotor effect. As I pointed out in a piece on dowsing for bombs in 2013: "The dowsing rod may be a convenient way of accessing unconscious knowledge. A 2012 study at the University of British Columbia showed that when subjects had to 'guess' answers that they knew but could not consciously recall, their success rate was no better than chance. But when they used a Ouija board to answer, their success rate was dramatically higher: the unconscious knowledge made itself known via the ideomotor effect. See [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053810012000402](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053810012000402)" [FT301:12].

So experienced hydrologists may simply be using the rod to amplify and justify their hunches. Maybe.

**David Hambling**

*By email*

## Pantheons maligned

It is bit of a stretch to equate the alleged extraterrestrial Ashtar with the iconic Ishtar just because they sound the same ("Ashtar and Ishtar" by Gareth J Medway, FT358:73), or to equate Ashtar with the Isaiah text, given the many diverse interpretations and hermeneutical caveats associated with the text. Although Christianity itself is a mish-mash of Judaism and borrowed theological notions from other and far older religious belief-systems (be it Greek philosophy, Zoroastrian dualism or Hindu notions of the Trinity and incarnations or avatars of the Divine), Christians throughout history have systematically maligned and demonised the pantheons of deities and spirits associated with every other religious belief-system, and continue to do the same today when it comes to anything extraterrestrial.

Similarly, Islam is little more than a mish-mash of Judaism and Christianity, and includes many elements of the pre-Islamic belief-system, but Islam at least retained belief in the djinn. Certainly djinn are very akin to the fairies in European folklore, and also to many extraterrestrial



## New mummified cat

With reference to "Suffolk mummified cat safari" by Matt Salusbury [FT363:74-76]: I have just accessioned a new mummified cat from a house in Hatter Street, Bury St Edmunds, for the Moyses Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds. The street was in the mediæval Jewish quarter of the town, and I found reference to a St Robert's Hall. St Robert was the martyred child of the blood sacrifice libel; an identical story features William of Norwich, but this cult would have been viewed as crypto-Catholic by the 17th century. The mummified cat is now on display in the museum.

**Alex McWhirter**

*Heritage Officer,  
Moyes Hall  
Museum*



entities. Indeed, Muslims cite everything from spectral appearances to bizarre extraterrestrial encounters as manifestations of the djinn. Even so, similarity does not necessarily mean that they are one and the same.

Furthermore, Christians like to boast that the Bible (or rather their particular brand or interpretation of Scripture), makes Christianity the supreme arbiter of religious truth and that every other belief is not only insufficient by comparison but at worst inspired by Satan – and therefore other entities like fairies or ex-

traterrestrials could not possibly exist in a world-view that only allows for angels and demons.

Despite Christianity's spiritual arrogance and myopia in regard to belief in the former, however, otherworldly beings have always been a standard feature of so-called paganism, which predates the emergence of monotheistic religion by millennia. As such, I have more faith in the reality of fairies and extraterrestrials than the demonological musings of Christianity.

**David Keyworth**

*Maryborough, Australia*



# LETTERS

## Giant cephalopods

In his article, 'High priests and kraken soup' [FT362:56-57], Charles Paxton argues – wrongly in my view – that Richard Freeman is borrowing from Bernard Heuvelmans's landmark study *In the Wake of the Sea Serpent* when he makes the mistaken assertion that the excommunication, and subsequent downfall, of Pierre Denys de Montfort was primarily the result of his belief in the existence of giant cephalopods. According to Paxton, Heuvelmans presents a 19<sup>th</sup> scientific community that is obstinate in its refusal to recognise giant cephalopods as a legitimate zoological specimen. Nineteenth century zoologists, Paxton observes, "were open-minded naturalists... [who] had no reason to disbelieve accounts of giant 'calarmaries' from the abundant eyewitness testimony and physical evidence of large species". Yet this is the very portrait of this scientific community Heuvelmans provides!

In fact, as Heuvelmans illustrates, establishment scientific ridicule of de Montfort resulted from what they viewed to be his rather sensationalist claims: for example, his unsustainable argument that the creatures were not squid at all – as most eyewitnesses described them – but rather 'colossal octopi', and that this category is distinct from the related 'kraken octopus', coupled with his decidedly unscientific contention that the creatures are inherently evil, with "a propensity for destruction and slaughter", whereas the 'kraken octopi' "has more peaceful habits".

According to Heuvelmans, de Montfort's "colossal octopus" was treated as a complete invention, he was thought to be mad, it was rumoured that his lies ended in forgery and his being committed to the galleys, and quite recently he was described in *The Times* as 'an unscrupulous rascal at one time in the employ of the Paris Museum'" (Heuvelmans, 56-57). In fact, in line with Paxton's argument, Heuvelmans's text presents repeated examples of a 19th century scientific community much willing to entertain – and even study, should a specimen surface



ABOVE: An early F-117 'Stealth fighter' being refuelled in mid-air, complete with an A-7 lurking in the background. Maybe they were en route across the Atlantic.

– giant cephalopods, especially given the considerable reputable eyewitness testimony. Thus, contrary to Paxton's assertion, Heuvelmans also maintains that de Montfort's ignominious end did not result from rejection by the scientific community for his belief in giant cephalopods, but rather his meritless and scientifically unsound claims concerning both their classification and character.

**Eric Hoffman**

*Vernon, Connecticut*

## Stealth fighters

I would like to pick up on something in Ian Simmons's review of *UFOs, Chemtrails and Aliens* [FT363:57]. Dismissing the 'stealth fighter' as possible culprit for the Belgian 'wave' in 1989, he uses the argument that it was not revealed for another 10 years. However, it was actually revealed by the USAF in 1988, and became famous in the Desert Storm in 1991. Simmons also dismisses the notion that the F-117 would have been tested "over Belgium" (putting to one side that it would take about 25 minutes for a jet to cross the country – any such stealth jet would merely have been passing through!)

I'm going to put my anorak on now, so bear with me, but in fact it is not at all unusual for new aircraft types to be tested around the world – a pattern that has been repeated by the F-22 and F-35 jets that have followed

it. Until the F-117 was revealed, the squadron then operating it and preparing it for use – part of the 4450th Test Group – was equipped with recently retired A-7 Corsairs to provide them with a 'cover story' that they were testing new avionics and to explain the increased aircraft activity at Tonopah airfield where their F-117's were based (these only flew at night until declassified). In fact, the old A-7's were fitted with the F-117 navigation kit, and possibly targeting equipment too, to enable the pilots to practise with it in a less challenging environment (i.e. in daylight). This is relevant because A-7's from the 4450TG deployed to RAF Woodbridge in the late 1980s and there has been a rumour ever since that wherever the squadron's A-7's went, the F-117's went too. I know about this deployment because an old friend of mine went down to Suffolk to see them (but was unaware that F-117's may also have been there). While the 4450TG certainly deployed to South Korea in 1984, I can find no mention on the Internet of F-117's being seen – though the psy-ops there reported on Wikipedia for the squadron are entertaining reading, and worthy of the excellent *Mirage Men* book... Conjecture I know, but my point is that it can't be dismissed that F-117's weren't operating in Europe at the time.

Anyway, anorak off again, I am not saying what was seen was the F-117, but the assertion Sim-

mons made is a bit slapdash; I hope this is taken in the spirit intended, as I admire his work.

**Bert Gray-Malkin**

*Portishead, Bristol*

## Squid attacks

Nick Warren stated that squid attacks are all fictional [FT363:72]. However, I recall seeing on Arthur C Clarke's "Mysterious World / Universe" programme a film of a Garcia Class FF / DE 1040 in dry-dock and her Executive Officer pulling claws out of the rubber of the ANSQ 26 Sonar Dome. The rubber was torn to shreds and the claws were bigger than any known squid. (As far as I know, only a species of Antarctic squid have those weird claws in their suction cups.) I thought it was the *USS Garcia*, but a quick search online tells me it may have been a sister ship, *USS Stein* FF 1065, as they had the identical problem in 1978. It was the same low frequency sonar on both ships, and I also recall that a merchant ship had twice been attacked in the Atlantic by different squid on the same voyage. It was suggested that some odd vibration attracted the squid to attack her screws and kill themselves. Unfortunately, the Navy removes the logbooks while the ships are under repair, or I could have looked at *Garcia's* when I was babysitting her.

**James Boyd**

*Leesburg, Florida*

# IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of [www.forteantimes.com](http://www.forteantimes.com)

## Pan in avian form?

Sometime in the early autumn of 2013, I found myself once again in the small, but extremely pretty and tranquil seaside village of Rockliffe, on the Rough Firth, Dumfries (pictured at right). It is a place of Dark Age hill forts, tidal islands, flotsam-fashioned fishing line-haired effigies of local women drowned as witches – and most intriguingly, an area further along away from the small village which seems to be the work of an outsider-artist of fortean bent: colourful chimerical creatures fashioned from branches, stone and rock lurk hidden round every corner.

The reason behind what was now an annual visit to Rockliffe was to meet my father and his musical companion who were playing at the village pub, a seasonal tradition dating back several years, my father being a local folk musician. I caught an early train from Manchester, then a bus from Dumfries, dropping me several miles down the coast from Rockliffe itself early in the evening. Having walked the coastal path before, I knew that I was not well enough acquainted with it to attempt the two-hour walk so close to sunset, so I called a cab to take me the final stretch, and waited at the fork of the road and the pathway down to the coast.

After waiting maybe five minutes I started to relax, acclimatising to the bucolic surrounds and peaceful air and gradually slipped into the frame of mind I come to associate with and seek in such places, where the mind frees itself a little from the quotidian concerns of the city and thoughts start to slow. I noticed a bird circling my head; it was as small as a wren and as fast and acrobatic as a swift. It circled me, ever faster in smaller, tighter concentric circles round my head. I felt it was both preening and joyous, playful and slightly threatening in its impressive display, which



lasted a minute or two, the bird gradually widening its arc before flying off.

That evening I sat at the bar listening to the music and idly chatting to my then girlfriend by text, and she reported to me the following: as it was such a lovely late autumnal morning, she had taken an irregular route to work, crossing the playing fields between her house and the local tram stop. Half way across, a small bird had attracted her attention, flying in large circles around her, becoming tighter and tighter as she stood stock still and watched it aiming straight between her eyes before veering, then playfully diving and arcing around her, before slowly increasing the diameter of the circle and eventually leaving. Neither of us had witnessed such avian behaviour before or since.

What I think we both saw that day was the whole gamut of the god Pan's classic traits – playful, slightly conceited and not a little menacing. In such a setting it's not hard to believe that the ancient gods still dwell there, and it's hugely heartening to think Pan would deign to manifest in a suburban playing field.

**Rob Grolerd**  
*Manchester*

## Sky triangles

At about 11.10pm on Saturday 10 June 2017, my husband and I were sitting outside chatting and watching the stars and the bright Moon. We live in Surrey and our garden faces south, looking towards Sandown racecourse. We are also on the Heathrow flight paths, so we see a lot of aircraft. As we sat there we both noticed two bright lights in the sky to our right coming towards each other – just like plane lights. We commented that they were a bit close and as we did so a third light came up from below, moving towards them. It looked like they were going to collide, but then the weirdest thing happened: they formed a close triangle of lights and disappeared. Totally. All three just winked out as if they'd never been there. We kept watching, expecting to see something if they'd just changed direction, but no sign. Just gone. It was a lovely clear night, no clouds and the wind had dropped. We were also sober. Neither of us (and my husband is pretty sceptical) could think of a good explanation – except maybe military planes?

**Emma Barton**  
*By email*

One day in July 1995, I was sitting in my back garden and, looking up at the sky, noticed a small and perfectly equilateral white triangle up above. It was moving at a snail's pace and momentarily stopped, right above me. After a minute or so, it continued on its way and eventually floated out of view. It was certainly not a cloud formation, as it stopped as described whilst the cloud in the stratosphere was moving in the wind. Can anyone suggest what this might have been?

**Phil Brand**  
*London*

## Robins and funerals

Robins, it seems, have long been associated with death and funerals, even though on the surface they would appear to represent all that is bright and life-affirming. I wonder if our own experience serves to re-enforce this superstition. During virtually the whole of 2008 we had a robin whose singing put all the other birds to shame. He had the most confident and powerful song we've ever heard, starting his early morning recital even before the blackbird was up and about.

We got to calling him Robin Caruso, and his presence continued to be a source of delight, month after month – until the day of my father-in-law's funeral at the beginning of December. While washing the car preparatory to driving down to the church, little Caruso flew into the hedge within a couple of feet of me, and sat there singing his heart out as though wishing to bring some cheer into a sad occasion. We never saw or heard him again – ever. In fact, it was several years before we once again had a resident robin. Little Robin Caruso was something extra special, and we mourned his going long after he vanished.

**Roger Wyld**



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# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an

intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

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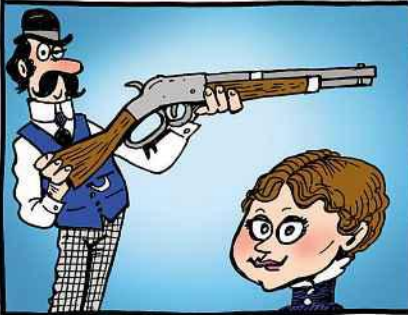
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# PHENOMENOMIX THE WINCHESTER MYSTERY HOUSE HUNT EMERSON

WILLIAM WIRT WINCHESTER INVENTED HIS Eponymous RIFLE IN 1866! WHEN HE DIED IN 1881 HIS WIFE SARAH INHERITED ENORMOUS WEALTH!



SHE VISITED ADAM COONS, A PSYCHIC MEDIUM, WHO TOLD HER...

THE WINCHESTER FAMILY IS HAUNTED BY THE GHOSTS OF ALL THOSE KILLED BY THE RIFLE...



YOU MUST MOVE WEST, AND BUILD!



SHE BOUGHT A PROPERTY IN SAN JOSE, CA. AND CONSTRUCTION WORK COMMENCED! IT CONTINUED NON-STOP FOR THE NEXT 38 YEARS - TO FEND OFF THE MALIGNANT SPIRITS...

IF WE STOP BUILDING, WE ARE DOOMED!

YES, M'AM...



THE HOUSE BECAME BIGGER AND BIGGER - AND EVER MORE STRANGE!

IT HAD DOORS OPENING ONTO BLANK WALLS...



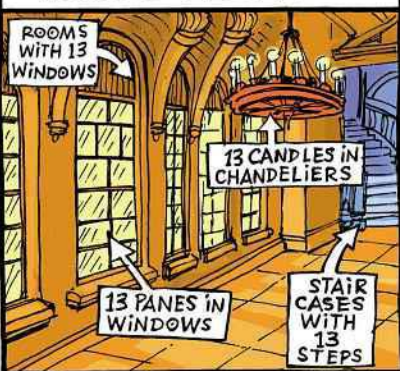
...STAIRCASES THAT LED NOWHERE...



...LABYRINTHINE ROOMS AND CORRIDORS...



THE NUMBER 13 RECURRED FREQUENTLY IN THE HOUSE'S DESIGNS...



SARAH WAS OBSESSED BY THE NUMBER 13 - HER WILL WAS WRITTEN IN 13 SECTIONS, AND SHE SIGNED IT 13 TIMES!



SARAH LIVED IN THE WINCHESTER MYSTERY HOUSE UNTIL THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE, WHEN SHE WAS TRAPPED IN A BEDROOM FOR SEVERAL HOURS...

13 HOURS, ACTUALLY!



AFTER THAT SHE MOVED OUT, BUT INSISTED THAT CONSTRUCTION BE CONTINUED AS BEFORE...

BUILD MORE AT THE BACK OF THE HOUSE! WE'VE BEEN SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME ON THE FRONT, AND THE SPIRITS ARE ANGRY!

YES, M'AM...



WHEN SHE DIED - OF HEART FAILURE, IN HER SLEEP, IN 1922 - THE HOUSE WAS SOLD, AND TURNED INTO A TOURIST ATTRACTION...



IT MUST BE SAID THAT SARAH'S BIOGRAPHER DENIES THAT THE STRANGER STORIES ABOUT HER WERE TRUE - THAT, FOR INSTANCE, THE NEW OWNERS INSTALLED "13" FEATURES IN THE HOUSE IN ORDER TO ENHANCE HER LEGEND!

BUT HER BIOGRAPHER IS A SPOILSPORT!

WE KNOW WHICH VERSION OF SARAH WINCHESTER'S LIFE WE PREFER, DON'T WE, FORTÉAN CHUMS!?





# COMING NEXT MONTH



## MARKS OF THE DEVIL THE MAKING OF WITCHFINDER GENERAL



## HITLER'S CAT LADY THE ALT RIGHT RESURRECTION OF SAVITRI DEVI



KUBRICK'S 2001 AT 50,  
CRY OF THE BANSHEE,  
THE SALZBURG CUBE,  
AND MUCH MORE...

# FORTEAN TIMES 367

ON SALE 24 MAY 2018

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Two Indian lovers hatched a bizarre murder plot, inspired by the Telugu movie *Evadu* – a spinoff of Hollywood film *Face Off* – in which actor Allu Arjun undergoes plastic surgery to resemble another character in the film, played by Ram Charan Tej. On 27 November, Swati Reddy, 27, and her lover Rajesh Ajakolu injected Swati's husband Sudhakar Reddy, 32, of Nagarkurnool in Telangana state with an anaesthetic and then killed him with an iron rod before disfiguring his face and burying his body in Nawabpet forest 90 miles (145km) away, after partially burning it to prevent identification. "Sudhakar Reddy was operating a stone-crushing unit," said the deputy superintendent of police in Nagarkurnool. "He married Swati, a trained nurse, and the couple was blessed with two children. Swati would go to Rajesh for physiotherapy and later they started having an affair. The duo felt Sudhakar was an obstacle in their relationship and decided to eliminate him."

After they dumped the body, Swati smeared Rajesh's face with acid and petrol, then called her relatives and spun a tale about four unidentified people breaking into the house and throwing acid on her husband. Rajesh, now posing as Sudhakar, was taken to Apollo Hospital in Hyderabad and Sudhakar's brother filed a complaint over the alleged assault. The plan was for Rajesh to get plastic surgery as soon as he recovered, so he could take Sudhakar's place as Swati's husband and claim his assets. When the burns began healing, Rajesh dared not speak for fear his voice would give him away, and answered questions in writing. The plot unravelled when Rajesh was served mutton soup but refused it, writing that he was a vegetarian. Sudhakar's family knew Sudhakar was fond of mutton, so they started asking the patient all kinds of questions about family members, which he failed to answer. Swati was taken to the police station for interrogation and buckled under pressure, confessing the murder and revealing the location of her husband's body. *Times of India*, [odditycentral.com](http://odditycentral.com), 13 Dec; *D.Telegraph*, 14 Dec; *Metro*, 15 Dec 2017.

A former rock guitarist hanged himself after he developed hearing so sensitive he could hear his eyeballs moving in

their sockets. Kelvin Edmunds, 61, from Cardiff, suffered from a rare condition that amplified every sound he heard. He stuffed tissue paper into his ears to drown outside noises, but could hear his own heartbeat and his eyeballs moving in his head. His mental health deteriorated due to his Superior Semicircular Canal Dehiscence Syndrome (SSCDS), from which he had suffered for 15 years. "He would go to bed just to get some silence," said his partner, Phanrutai Walford. "He had two operations to sort it out, but they didn't work." He had attacked Ms Walford after she prevented an earlier suicide attempt, and went missing on 5 October 2017, the day he was due to be sentenced for the attack, and was found dead later that day. The inquest in Glamorgan heard Edmunds had worked as an engineer in Libya after Rhode Island Red, his Welsh rock band, failed to make the big time. *D.Telegraph*, *Sun*, 1 Feb 2018.

Aliyu Yahuza, 27, consulted a herbalist called Usman Saidu, 42, who gave him a bulletproof concoction to drink in Katsina, Nigeria. Police prosecutor Sani Ado said: "Saidu was given a dane gun to test the reliability of the charm, but when he fired a shot at Yahuza's chest, he fell down and died on the spot." Saidu was charged with criminal conspiracy and culpable murder. [gossip.naija.ng](http://gossip.naija.ng) (*Nigeria Breaking News*), 10 Jan 2018.

On 16 December, police in rural Virginia came upon some dogs apparently guarding an animal carcass. However, the dead body turned out to be Bethany Stephens, 22, who had been killed by her two pit bulls while taking them for a walk. The dogs were eating her and were subsequently put down. (*Queensland Courier Mail*, 21 Dec 2017.

Korean student Hyewon Kim, 23, asked a stranger to take her picture on top of Seven Sisters cliffs in East Sussex. The images show her jumping in the air extremely close to the cliff edge, finally landing with one foot on the crumbling clifftop and the other off it. She plunged more than 200ft (60m) to her death. The site is popular with Asian visitors because it is named after the daughters of the Chinese Jade Emperor. (*Sydney D.Telegraph*, 14 Oct 2017.

